

BOY TRAPPER SERIES



HARRY CASTLEMAN





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DAVE, THE MAIL CARRIER.

BOY TRAPPER SERIES.

THE
MAIL CARRIER.

By HARRY CASTLEMON,

AUTHOR OF "THE FRANK NELSON SERIES," "THE SPORTSMAN'S CLUB SERIES,"
"GUNBOAT SERIES," &C.



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THE MAIL CARRIER.

CHAPTER I.

“HARK BACK!”

LOOK out thar, Dannie! Don't run over a feller!”

Dan Evans, who was trudging along the dusty road, with his eyes fastened thoughtfully on the ground, and his mind so wholly given up to meditation that he did not know what was going on around him, stopped suddenly when these words fell upon his ear, and looked up to find himself confronted by a horseman, who had checked his nag just in time to prevent the animal from stepping on the boy. He was a small planter in the neighborhood, and Dan was well acquainted with him.

“You're gettin' to be sich rich folks up to your house that you look fur everybody to get outen your

way, I reckon, don't you?" continued the planter, with a good-natured smile.

"Rich!" repeated Dan, flushing angrily, as he drew his tattered coat about him. He did not know what the planter meant, and thought he was making sport of his poverty. "I can't help it kase I don't wear good clothes like Don and Bert, kin I? I work monstrous hard——"

"And get well paid fur it, too, *I* tell you," interrupted the horseman. "I'd be glad of a chance to 'arn that much money myself. You needn't wear sich clothes as them no longer, kase Dave an' you is pardners, most likely, an' he'll do what's right by you."

"Dave!" echoed Dan, who now began to listen more eagerly.

"Yes. He's a powerful smart boy, Dave is, an' I'm glad to see him so lucky. He took home a wad of greenbacks this arternoon as big as that," said the planter, pushing back his sleeve and showing his brawny wrist.

Dan fairly gasped for breath. He backed toward a log by the roadside and seated himself upon it, letting his rifle fall out of his hands in his excitement.

"Yes," continued the planter, who seemed to be a little surprised at Dan's behavior; "them quails reached that man up North all right, an' to-day the money come—a hundred an' ninety-two dollars an' a half."

Dan gasped again, and, taking off his hat, drew his coat-sleeve across his forehead.

"Yes. Silas Jones, he done took twenty-eight dollars outen it fur freight an' give Dave the balance—a trifle over a hundred an' sixty-four dollars. I was in the store at the time, an' it done me good to see Dave take them thar greenbacks an' walk out."

"Whar—whar's the money now?" Dan managed to ask at last.

"Why, he took it home with him, I reckon. What else should he do with it? Now, Dannie, don't you get on a high hoss an' say that you won't look at us common folks any more."

With this parting advice the planter rode off, leaving Dan sitting on his log, lost in wonder. It was a long time before he recovered himself, and when he did, he jumped to his feet as if he had just thought of something that ought to have been at-

tended to long ago, caught up his rifle and disappeared in the woods.

This incident happened on the same day on which Silas Jones paid David for the quails he had shipped by the steamer Emma Deane. At the close of the second volume of this series, we saw that as soon as David had received the reward of his labors he made all haste to reach home. He found his mother there, but before he said a word to her about his good fortune he walked around the cabin two or three times and looked sharply in every direction, to make sure that his brother Dan was nowhere in the vicinity ; and having satisfied himself on this point, he went in and laid the roll of greenbacks in his mother's lap.

David had reason to feel proud, for he had earned the money in spite of many obstacles. In the first place, there was Dan, who, when he learned that his brother was in a fair way to earn a handsome sum of money by trapping quails and shipping them to a man in the North, who had advertised for them, determined to share in the proceeds of his work, and offered to go into partnership with him ; but David would not consent, and this made Dan his enemy. Dan declared that not a quail should be caught in

those fields. He would make it his business to hunt up his brother's traps, and if there were any birds in them he would either liberate them or wring their necks, and then he would smash the traps. But, as it happened, Dan did not carry this threat into execution. An older and wiser person than himself, with whom he held frequent consultations, had another plan to propose, and Dan readily fell in with it.

Godfrey Evans, Dan's father and David's, was in deep disgrace. He had robbed Clarence Gordon of twenty dollars on the highway, and for fear that he would be arrested and punished for it, he took to the woods and stayed there. He lived on a little island in the bayou, about two miles from the settlement, which had been his hiding-place during the war, when the Union forces were raiding that part of Mississippi. Here he lived in a miserable brush lean-to, with no companion but his rifle, until his hiding-place was accidentally discovered by Dan, during one of his rambles in the woods.

Of course Godfrey was anxious to know what had been going on in the settlement since he left, and among other things Dan told him that David was going to make himself rich by catching quails, but

that he (Dan) had resolved to put a stop to it by breaking his traps. After hearing a statement of the case, Godfrey told his hopeful son that if he wished to be revenged upon David for his refusal to go into partnership with him, there was a better way than that. It was not to their interest to interfere with the *Boy Trapper* in any manner. Let him go on and catch the birds, and when his work was done and he had received the money for it, *then* it would be time for them to act. They would take the money themselves and divide it equally between them. Godfrey did not say what he intended to do with his share when he got it, but he drew the most glowing pictures of the comforts and luxuries with which Dan could provide himself when he received the money that would fall to his lot. Dan wanted to live just as Don and Bert Gordon lived. He wanted a spotted pony, a breech-loading shot-gun, a jointed fish-pole and a sail-boat; and in order to insure his earnest assistance in the scheme he proposed, Godfrey held out the idea that for seventy-five dollars (they expected that David would receive one hundred and fifty dollars for his birds, and that would give them just seventy-five dollars apiece, if the money were equally (divided) all these nice

things could be purchased, and besides something would be left to be invested in good clothes.

Dan was delighted with his father's plans, and from that hour was as much interested in David's success as David was himself. It chanced, too, that he was able to defeat a plot which, if carried into execution, would have worked much injury to the boy trapper. It turned out that there were two other persons in the settlement whom David had reason to fear. They were Lest · Brigham and Bob Owens; and as they did not expect to share in the money after David earned it, they were determined that he should not earn any at all. They were disappointed applicants for the very contract that had been given to David. When they read the advertisement in the *Red and Gun*, calling for fifty dozen live quails, they lost no time in replying to it; but they were just three days too late, the wide-awake Don Gordon having already secured the order for David Evans.

When Bob and Lester found this out they were very angry. Bob wanted a breech-loader as much as Dan did. Almost every boy in the settlement with whom he associated owned one, and seventy-five dollars would put him in possession of one, too.

He had long been on the lookout for a chance to earn that amount of money, and when it was almost within his grasp it was snatched from him by that meddlesome Don Gordon and handed over to that ragamuffin Dave Evans. This was the way Bob and his friend looked at the matter, and after they had talked it over they came to the conclusion that David had no business with so much money, and that he should not have it. They wrote to the man who had advertised for the quails, telling him that the person to whom he had given the order was not reliable and could not furnish him with the required number of birds; and then they set to work to make their words good.

The first thing they did was to try to frighten David by threatening him with the terrors of a law which did not exist. Lester told him that if he trapped quails and sent them out of the state he would render himself liable to fine and imprisonment; but David knew better, and positively refused to give up his chances of earning an honest dollar, although Lester threatened to beat him with his riding-whip if he did not. Being defeated at this point, the conspirators tried another plan. They drew up a constitution and by-laws for the govern-

ment of a Sportsman's Club, and Lester started out to obtain signers to it. He first called upon Don and Bert Gordon, for he knew that if he could secure their names, he could secure Fred and Joe Packard's, too, and, through the influence of these four, every young sportsman in the settlement could be brought into the club. But Don and Bert did not like Lester, and neither did they like the object for which the club was to be organized. They saw plainly that Bob and Lester were trying to form a combination against David Evans, and as they could not assist in any such business as that, they declined to put down their names.

Highly enraged over their second failure, Bob and Lester prepared to take vengeance on the brothers, which they did that very night by setting fire to their shooting-box, which was located on the shore of the lake. Then, being determined that they would not give up until David had been driven from the field, they decided upon another plan, which was to set their own traps, which they had made in expectation of receiving the order, capture as many birds as they could, and at the same time watch David's traps and steal every quail they found in them. But this plan failed also. The quails would

not get into their traps and they could not find any of David's. The reason was because they looked on Godfrey's plantation for them, and David's traps were all set in General Gordon's fields.

The conspirators did not know that Don and Bert were assisting David in his work, but they found it out one morning by accident. They saw the three boys in the act of transferring their captured quails from a trap to a large coop they had placed in a wagon, and following the wagon as it left the field, they saw that when the captives were removed from the coop they were put into one of the general's unoccupied negro cabins. After comparing notes they made up their minds that the cabin was almost full of birds, and that if they could only force an entrance into it, they would be well repaid for their trouble. They could steal some of them, and those they could not carry away they could liberate. They made the attempt that same night, and were sorry enough for it afterward. Dan Evans was on the watch, and he defeated their designs very neatly by directing the attention of Don's hounds to them. The fierce animals forced the young robbers to take refuge on the top of the cabin, and there they re-

mained until the general came down and released them in the morning.

While these incidents, which we have so hurriedly described, were taking place in the settlement, some others that have a connection with our story were transpiring a little way out of it. The most important of these was the discovery of Godfrey's hiding-place by Don and his brother, who went up the bayou duck-hunting. It happened on the same day that Dan discovered it, and led to a good many incidents, some of which we have yet to describe. The most amusing, perhaps, was the stratagem to which Godfrey resorted to drive Don and Bert away from the island.

The brothers landed to take a few minutes' rest after their long pull, and the first thing Don discovered was his canoe, which he valued highly, and which had been stolen from him a few days before. The thief was Godfrey Evans, who made use of the canoe in passing from the main land to his hiding-place on the island. The fresh footprints which were plainly visible in the soft mud showed that there was somebody besides themselves on the island, and they resolved to find out who he was. While they were advancing along a narrow path

leading toward the interior, Godfrey, who with Dan was concealed in the cane at the other end of the path, imitated the growl of some wild animal so perfectly that Don and Bert, who were armed only with their light breech-loaders, made all haste to reach their boat and push off into the stream. Perhaps the remembrance of the scenes that had once been enacted in that same cane-brake added to their terror. The place was known as Bruin's Island, from the fact that a savage old bear had once made his den there, and had been killed only after a severe fight, during which he had wounded two men and destroyed a number of dogs.

Don and Bert really believed that another bear had taken possession of the island, and they resolved to dislodge him; so they secured the services of David Evans and his rusty single-barrel shot-gun, and the next morning returned to the island, accompanied by two good dogs and armed with weapons better adapted to hunting such large game than their little fowling-pieces were, Don being armed with his trusty rifle and Bert with his father's heavy duck gun. They wanted to shoot the bear if they could, and if they failed in that, they came provided with

tools and bait with which to set a trap that would catch him alive.

It is proper to state that there *was* a bear, which divided his time about equally between the island and the main shore, and the boys thought they would certainly have an opportunity to try their skill upon him on this particular morning, for the hounds scented something that drove them almost wild with excitement. But it was not a bear they scented; it was Godfrey Evans, who waited until both dogs and hunters were hidden from view by the cane, and then stepped into the bayou and struck out for the main land. The boys, however, firmly believed that the dogs had routed a bear, and they spent the day in building a trap for him, hoping that the next time they visited the island they would find the animal in it.

Now Godfrey had found it necessary to spend some of the money of which he had robbed Clarence Gordon, but he still had fourteen dollars of it left. As his pockets could not be depended upon to hold it, being full of holes, he hid the money in a hollow log, where he thought it would be safe. The sudden appearance of the young hunters and their dogs so greatly excited and alarmed him that he

never thought of his treasure when he left the island, nor did he ever think of it again until Dan happened to mention it to him a day or two afterward. Then Godfrey swam back to his old hiding-place, but the money could not be found. Don and his companions had changed the appearance of things considerably while they were building the trap. Thickets had been cut down, logs rolled out of the way, and Godfrey could not find the place where he had hidden his ill-gotten gains. Of course he was almost beside himself with fury, and for want of a better way of being revenged on the young hunters, he sprung their trap and carried off the lever, rope and bait. He would have been glad to tear the trap in pieces, but it had been built to resist the strength of a full-grown bear, and Godfrey could not move any of the logs. When Don and Bert came up in their boat, to see if the bear had been caught, they found their trap in the condition we have described. They set it again, and how their efforts were rewarded this time we have yet to tell.

Meanwhile the work of trapping the quails went bravely on. Assisted by Don and Bert, who devoted as many hours to the business as David did himself, the boy trapper saw money coming in every

day in the shape of scores of little brown birds, and he would have been as happy as any fellow could well be, had it not been for two unpleasant incidents that happened a short time before the attempt was made to rob the cabin, and which we neglected to notice in their proper place. One of these incidents was brought to his notice by his wide-awake enemies, Bob and Lester.

While these two worthies were discussing their prospects one night, shortly after dark, they detected somebody in the act of robbing Mr. Owens's smoke-house. They succeeded in getting near enough to the thief to see that it was Godfrey Evans, and this suggested to them another plan for compelling David to leave off trapping the quails. Instead of reporting the matter to Mr. Owens, as they ought to have done, they sought an interview with David, and threatened that in case he did not leave them a clear field, they would have his father arrested for burglary. Of course David had no peace of mind after that; and, as if to add to his troubles, his brother Dan, who had already been the means of swindling Don Gordon out of ten dollars, made an effort to extort ten dollars more from him by stealing his fine young pointer, *Dandy*. But David was able to de-

feat this scheme, though at serious loss to himself. He visited his father's new hiding-place in the woods, and, finding the pointer there, he succeeded in liberating him and starting him toward home; but in his desperate efforts to escape the punishment with which his angry parent threatened him he was obliged to swim the bayou, and in so doing lost his gun. He brought the pointer home, however, and saved Don's ten dollars.

But if David had more than his share of trouble, he also had about as much good luck as generally falls to the lot of mortals. The quails got into his traps almost as fast as he wanted to take them out; and furthermore, General Gordon, who had long had his eye on the boy, was using his influence to secure for him the responsible position of MAIL CARRIER; but in so doing the general excited the jealousy of one of his neighbors, who envied him his popularity in the settlement, and would have been glad to injure him by any means in his power. This jealous neighbor was Mr. Owens, Bob's father.

At first Mr. Owens did not care who took the old mail carrier's place, so long as it was not some one who was recommended by General Gordon; but

after he had talked with Bob about it, it occurred to him that it would be a fine thing if his own son could have the position instead of that low fellow, Dave Evans. Bob thought so, too, and suddenly made up his mind that nothing could suit him better. More than that, he looked upon the matter as settled already. His father promised that he would do the best he could for him; Lester said that *his* father would furnish the required bonds, if he (Lester) asked him to do so, and Bob thought he needed nothing more. In his estimation, three hundred and sixty dollars a year (that was what the old carrier received) was a sum of money that he would find it hard work to spend, and the belief that he would soon be in a fair way to earn it was all he had to comfort him when he saw David Evans walking up and down the river bank, with his hands in his pockets, surveying with great satisfaction the long line of coops which contained the captured quails, and which were piled there awaiting the arrival of the Emma Deane.

"Just look at him," said Bob, in great disgust. "One would think, by the airs he puts on, that he was worth a million dollars."

"Let's come down here after dark and pitch every coop into the river," said Lester.

"Why, he will stay here to watch them, won't he?"

"What of that? If he says a word, we'll tumble him into the river, too!"

Bob said nothing would please him more. He and his crony rode down to the landing that night, about nine o'clock, fully determined to carry out Lester's suggestion; but, to their great surprise and disappointment, they found David and his property well guarded. A fire was burning brightly on the bank, and just in front of it was pitched a little lawn tent, which sheltered a merry party, consisting of Don and Bert Gordon and Fred and Joe Packard, who were singing songs and telling stories, while waiting for the lunch and pot of coffee which David was preparing for them. David looked up when he heard the sound of their horses' feet, and a large, tawny animal arose from his bed on the other side of the fire and growled savagely. Bob and his companion waited to see and hear no more. They had no desire to trouble such fellows as Don Gordon and Fred Packard, either of whom could have whipped them both, and they stood in wholesome

fear of that tawny animal behind the fire. It was the hound that had so nearly captured one of them on the night they attempted to break into the cabin in which the quails were confined. Without a word they turned their horses and rode homeward, and David and his property were allowed to rest in peace.

CHAPTER II.

A MIGHTY HUNTER.

THE shame and mortification which Bob and Lester experienced after being detected in their attempt to break into the negro cabin, were of short duration. They gradually recovered their courage and began to mingle again with their associates; and although they saw one or two sly winks exchanged the first time they went to the post-office, no one said anything to them about being treed on the top of the cabin, and they hoped the circumstance was not known. But still they felt guilty, and were much more at their ease when they were alone.

They had much to talk about. Lester could never cease grumbling because David had succeeded in his enterprise, in spite of all their efforts to defeat him, and Bob, who was full of dreams and glorious ideas, was continually talking about the fine things he would purchase when he became mail carrier and

was earning three hundred and sixty dollars a year. Then he and his friend Lester would see no end of fun. They would have a canoe in the lake and a shooting-box on the shore. They would camp out twice a year, as Don and Bert did, and they would have a crowd of fellows with them of their own choosing. As soon as Bob had earned money enough to purchase his breech-loader, he would invest in a dozen or two of decoys, and they would show that conceited Don Gordon that some boys were just as fine marksmen as he was, and could bag just as many birds in the course of a week's shooting.

Lester readily fell in with these ideas, and suggested that, as they had no better way of passing the time just then, it might be well to make the canoe at once. Then they could explore the lake from one end to the other, and select a good shooting point whereon to build their house. Bob thought so, too, and with the help of one of his father's negroes, who was handy with the axe and had shaped more than one dugout, they succeeded, after two days' work, in producing a very nice little canoe, just about large enough to carry two persons and their camp equipage. Having no iron rowlocks, they made two paddles for it; and when they had

given it a coat or two of lead-colored paint, they told each other that it was a much better and handsomer craft than Don Gordon's. On the same day on which David received his money for the quails, they put the canoe into a wagon, hauled it down to the lake and made it fast to a tree in front of Godfrey Evans's cabin, promising Dan, who happened to be at home, that they would give him a dime or two occasionally, if he would keep an eye on it and see that no one ran off with it.

When they reached home they found Mr. Owens, who had just returned from the landing. They knew by the expression on his face that he had some news for them. Bob thought it must be something that related to his own prospects, and eagerly inquired:

"Have I got the appointment, father? Am I mail carrier now?"

"O, it isn't time for that," was the reply. "I have not even made my bid yet. I don't know that you ought to have it, Bob. A boy who will let a fellow like Dave Evans carry off a pocketful of money from under his very nose, I don't think much of."

"Has he received it?" asked Lester.

"I should say so. I saw Silas Jones pay him over a hundred and sixty dollars."

Lester pulled off his hat and threw himself on the porch beside Mr. Owens's chair, while Bob, who was so amazed and angry that he could not speak, stood still and looked at his father.

"See what you boys have lost by not having a little more 'get up' about you—eighty dollars apiece," continued Mr. Owens. "Where's your breech-loader now, Bob?"

"I could have bought one for that amount of money and a nice jointed fish-pole besides," said the boy, regretfully. "I hope Dave will lose every cent of it."

"He'll look out for that," answered Mr. Owens, with a laugh. "He has worked so hard for it that he'll not let it slip through his fingers very easily."

"He never would have got it if it hadn't been for Don and Bert," said Bob, spitefully. "But I don't care—I'll beat them all yet. Just wait till I get to be mail carrier, and I'll show them a thing or two. Don't you think I am sure to get it, father?"

"I think your chances are as good as anybody's. I haven't had an opportunity to speak to any one

about it yet, but I must be up and doing to-morrow, for the general is busy all the time. He intends to get the contract himself and hire Dave to do the work, and that is the way I shall have to do with you, if I get it. The general was talking about it to-day in the store. He didn't say a word to me—I suppose he thought I could neither help nor hinder him—but I walked up in front of him and told him very plainly that David was the son of a thief, and not fit to be trusted with such a valuable thing as the mail. You ought to have seen the general open his eyes. When I told him that Godfrey had robbed my smoke-house, he said David wasn't to blame for that. He couldn't help what his father did. I made no reply, for I didn't want to let him know that I am working against him. If I can get the bonds, I think the rest will be easy enough."

"I'll speak to my father about it to-morrow night," said Lester. "Bob and I are going up the lake in the morning, and as soon as we get back I'll go home and fix the bond business."

Bob passed a sleepless night. He grew angry every time he thought of David's success, and jubilant and cheerful when he recalled his father's encouraging words. The air-castles he built were as

numerous and gorgeous as those Godfrey Evans erected when he told his family about the treasure that was buried in the general's potato-field.

The two boys arose the next morning at an early hour, and as soon as they had eaten breakfast and Mrs. Owens had put up a substantial lunch for them, they shouldered their guns and set out for the lake. Bob carried his father's muzzle-loading rifle, while Lester was armed with the heavy deer-gun with which he had bowled over so many bears and panthers in the wilds of northern Michigan. Lester delighted to talk of the wonderful exploits he had performed with that same rifle, and as he had a good memory and generally managed to tell the same story twice alike, Bob finally came to believe that he told nothing but the truth; but at the same time he thought it very strange that his friend could never be prevailed upon to give an exhibition of his skill.

They found Godfrey's cabin deserted by the family (if they had known what had happened there the night before, their delight would have been unbounded), but the canoe was where they left it, and they knew where to look to find the paddles. While Bob went in search of them, Lester unlocked

the chain with which the canoe was secured, put in the lunch basket and weapons, and, when all was ready, they pushed out into the lake.

"Yes, sir, this rifle holds a high place in my estimation," said Lester, continuing the conversation in which he and Bob had been engaged, as they came along the road. "It has saved my life more than once, as you know. The last bear I shot charged within five feet of me before I dropped him. I put four bullets into him in as many seconds. Where would your muzzle-loader be in such close quarters?"

"Nowhere," replied Bob. "That's what makes me so mad every time I think of Dave Evans. I might have ordered a nice gun and had it in my hands in a few days more, if it had not been for him. But I'll make it up when I get to be mail carrier."

"I'll tell you what else I've done with this rifle," continued Lester, who found as much pleasure in dwelling upon his imaginary exploits as Bob did in talking about his future prospects. "Once when I was walking through the woods I shot a gray squirrel out of the very top of the tallest shell-bark hickory I ever saw. It fell about four feet and

lodged on a little branch, which, from the ground, looked no larger than a knitting-needle. I wanted that squirrel, as it was the only one I had seen that day, but I didn't want to climb the tree to get it; so I hauled up off-hand and at the first shot I cut off that limb and brought down the squirrel. What do you think of that?"

"I think you are a splendid marksman," replied Bob. "Why don't you go to some of the shooting-matches about here? You would be certain to carry off some of the prizes. Let's see you take the head off that fellow," he added, pointing toward the shore.

Lester looked in the direction indicated by his friend's finger, and saw a quail sitting on a fallen log, close by the water's edge, evidently keeping watch over the rest of the flock, which were disporting themselves in the dusty road. As Bob spoke, the bird uttered a note of warning, and the flock hurried away into the bushes, but the sentinel kept his place on the log.

"Knock him over," said Bob. "He'll make a capital good dinner for us, if we don't find any ducks."

"I—I am all out of practice," replied Lester.

"I've seen the day that I could do it with my eyes shut."

"I can do it with my eyes open," said Bob.

He drew in his paddle as he spoke, picked up his father's rifle, and, resting his elbow on his knee, drew a bead on the bird's head and pulled the trigger. Bob was really a fine marksman, and the effect of his shot made Lester open his eyes in astonishment. The bird looked so small that it seemed useless to shoot at its head, but Bob made a centre shot. Lester had never seen anything like it. Bob had never before fired a rifle in his presence (he always used a shot-gun), and the reason was because Lester boasted so loudly of his own skill that Bob was afraid of being beaten.

They paddled ashore after the bird, and when they pushed out into the lake again. Lester had nothing more to say about hunting and shooting. He even showed a desire to abandon the trip up the lake and go home.

"I don't feel very well this morning," said he, "and I think we had better go back."

"O, no," replied Bob. "You can lie down in the bow of the canoe and I'll do the paddling. Does your head ache?"

“Dreadfully, and I thought perhaps it would be well to speak to father about those bonds of yours. We don’t want to be beaten again, you know.”

“Of course not, but if you speak to him to-night it will answer every purpose. If my father had been in any hurry he would have told you so. I have a plan to propose that will wake you up and put life into you. You remember that when you went over to get Don to join our Sportsman’s Club, he told you that he and Bert had been frightened off Bruin’s Island by a bear, don’t you? And you told him that perhaps you would go up there some day and shoot him?”

“Ah! yes, I think I remember some such conversation. But I don’t feel like it to-day. Some other time I’ll go up there with you, and if we find any bears there, I’ll show you how to hunt them.”

It was not at all probable that Lester or any other boy in the settlement could have taught Bob anything about bear-hunting. He had ridden to the hounds almost ever since he was large enough to sit on horseback. Nearly every planter in the neighborhood owned a pack of dogs, Mr. Owens among the number, and hunting with them was as much of a pastime as base ball is in the North, and during

the proper season was as regularly practised. Many an old bear had Bob seen "stretched" by the dogs, and the rifle he then carried had been the death of more of them than Lester could have counted on the fingers of both hands.

"It is strange that you never come out to any of our hunts," said Bob. "You have often been invited."

"I know it, but I can't see any fun in it," answered Lester, who knew that if he ever appeared among the hunters they would soon find out that he was a very poor horseman. "It is easy enough to kill a bear when you have a score or two of dogs to hold him for you; but I'd like to see one of you fellows walk into the woods and meet one alone, as I have. There's where the fun comes in."

"I should think so," answered Bob, as, with one sweep of his paddle, he brought the canoe to a standstill in the mouth of the bayou that led to Lavin's Island. "What do you say? Shall we go up?"

"Not to-day; my head aches too badly."

"I was all over that island this last summer," continued Bob; "you know one can wade out to it when the bayou is low; and I didn't see any bear sign. More than that, I know there hasn't been a

bear near the island for years ; but if we should go up there and find one, and you should shoot him, I don't know of anything that would make Don Gordon feel more ashamed of himself."

Lester was quick to catch at the idea thus thrown out. If there was no prospect of finding a bear on the island he had no objections to going there, or, rather, he wanted to go there. He could fearlessly explore the island and rely upon Bob to sound his praises in the settlement, and tell what a brave fellow he was and what a coward Don was.

"I don't think Don showed much pluck in running away before he saw the bear," said Lester.

"Of course he didn't," replied Bob.

"Are you *sure* there was no bear there?"

"I know it. Bears don't use on that island any more."

"Well, let's go up and see. If there is one there, I'll make you a present of his skin."

This was enough for Bob, who, with one sweep of his paddle, turned the canoe's head up the bayou. Somewhat to his surprise, his companion, who had been lying in the bow, holding both hands to his head, and acting altogether as if he felt very badly, straightened up and assisted him in propelling their

little craft. He recovered from his illness immediately, when he found that he could win a reputation, and at the same time run no risk of being called upon to exhibit the skill and courage of which he had so often boasted.

As they moved up the bayou, the ducks, which now began to arrive in great numbers, being driven from their far Northern homes by the approach of winter, arose from the water in numerous flocks; and after Bob had made two "pot shots" at them, aiming at the birds as they sat on the water, and missing both times, Lester mustered up courage enough to try his deer gun on a flock which swam out from a point a short distance in advance of them. Taking a quick aim at the birds, he managed, by the merest accident, to bag three of them—the ball passing through the head of one of the ducks, through the neck of another and through the body of a third. But the fact was they sat so closely together on the water that he could scarcely have missed them if he had tried.

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Bob. "Did you shoot at their heads?"

Lester was so greatly astonished at the result of his shot that he could not reply at once. With

mouth and eyes wide open, he gazed at the three ducks lying dead upon the water, then at the remainder of the flock, which were flying up the bayou, and then he blew the smoke out of the breech of his rifle and put in a fresh cartridge.

"O, you needn't try to look so surprised," exclaimed Bob. "I have always been afraid of you, and now I am satisfied that you can beat me. You are the best shot among the boys in this settlement."

"Well, you needn't say so before folks," replied Lester, as soon as he had somewhat recovered himself.

"Yes, I will," returned Bob. "I have heard some of the fellows say that they didn't believe you ever killed any game in your life, and now I can tell them differently. Can you do it again?"

"I am afraid not," answered Lester, with an air which said he could if he felt like it.

"I believe you can. The fellows around here have no business with you."

Lester was entirely satisfied with this. He had won a reputation as a marksman, and he had won it very easily. Many a reputation has been made in the same way—by accident. With an assumption of indifference which he was very far from feeling he

picked up the ducks as Bob paddled up to them, and fearing that his friend might ask him to try another shot, expressed a desire to be put on the island as soon as possible.

"I have got my hand in now," said he, "and I wouldn't turn my back on a grizzly."

"There's no bear on the island," replied Bob, "but I wish there was, for I would like to see you shoot him."

Although Lester was very proud of, and greatly encouraged by the chance shot he had just made, he could not echo his friend's wish; and if he had had the faintest suspicion that there was a bear within half a mile of him, he could not have been hired to remain in the bayou. He knew nothing whatever of the habits of the animal, but Bob did, and his positive assurance that bears never "used" on the island now was the only thing that induced Lester to consent to visit it. Still his heart beat much faster than usual when they rounded the bend and came within sight of the leaning sycamore behind which Godfrey Evans had been partially concealed when Dan first discovered him. In a few minutes more Bob drove the bow of the canoe so deeply into the

mud that the current could not carry it away, and the two boys jumped out on the bank.

“Don Gordon went over to Coldwater a year ago and brought back a bearskin which he showed to every body, with the story that he killed the bear who wore it,” said Bob, who never grew tired of saying hard things about the boy he hated. “I don’t believe it and never did. He has told all around the settlement that he was driven off this island by a bear a few days ago, and that he set a trap for him. I don’t believe that either; but we’ll just take a look around to satisfy ourselves, and then we’ll go back to the settlement and tell the truth about the matter. It is my opinion that Don is trying to make himself famous by telling big yarns; and if we can prove it, it will make him take a back seat, and it will put a feather in our caps besides. Now there used to be a path somewhere about here that led to the camp Godfrey Evans used to occupy while the Yanks were in this country, and I think I can find it.”

Having examined the cap on his rifle, Bob led the way along the beach and Lester fell back, quite willing that his friend should go on in advance; for when he came to look into the dense, dark thicket

which covered the interior of the island, his courage began to fail him.

Bob discovered the path in a very few minutes, and, greatly to his surprise, saw that it was not overgrown with reeds and briers, as he had expected to find it, and as it was the last time he saw it. On the contrary it was broad and well-beaten, for Godfrey, while he was hiding there, had often passed over it, and in order to facilitate his progress had broken down the briers and cane on each side. Bob's face grew pale and his hands began to tremble. He looked closely at the bushes and told himself that they had been borne down by some heavy animal; but he said nothing, for he was afraid that if he opened his mouth his courage would all leave him, and he did not want to show himself a coward in the presence of so mighty a hunter as his friend Lester. Believing that he had one at his back who would stand by him, no matter how much trouble he might get into, he grasped his rifle with a firmer hold, drew back the hammer and advanced slowly along the path.

"What made you cock your gun?" asked Lester, in a startled whisper. "And why do you move so slowly and cautiously?"

The answer almost froze the blood in Lester's veins.

"Do you see that?" replied Bob, in the same startled whisper, pointing to a footprint in the mud which looked as though it might have been made by a barefooted man. "Do you see these broken bushes? Do you see that smaller track there?" he added, a moment later, in accents of great alarm. "We are in a dangerous neighborhood, the first thing you know. There have been two bears along here—an old one and a cub; and I shouldn't wonder if they were on the island at this very minute. Yes, sir, they are, and there's one of 'em now!"

As Bob said this, there was a sudden commotion in the cane in front of them, accompanied by a hoarse growl. Bob beat a hasty retreat on the instant, jumping behind his companion before the latter could prevent it, and Lester found himself standing face to face with the first bear he had ever seen outside of a menagerie.

CHAPTER III.

LESTER SHOWS HIS COURAGE.

THE young hunters had advanced nearly to the end of the path and were now standing within a few feet of the clearing in which Godfrey had built his lean-to, and which had been torn down in order to make room for Don Gordon's bear trap. There were several large trees growing beside the path, and Bob quickly sprang behind one of them, leaving Lester standing alone within twenty yards of one of the largest bears that had ever been seen in that part of the country. Without an instant's hesitation Bob raised his rifle and pointed it at the breast of the animal, which had reared itself upon its hind legs, but the muzzle of the weapon waved about in the most alarming manner, and he could not hold it still to save his life. He found that there was a vast difference between facing a bear when he had twenty fierce dogs and as many armed horsemen to back him, and confronting the same animal on foot

with but a single companion to depend on. After a moment's reflection he lowered his rifle, for he knew that it would be folly to fire and wound the bear. He thought the safest plan would be to rely upon the superior skill and courage of his companion.

"Go for her!" said Bob, in a scarcely audible whisper. "Shoot her in the eye if you can; if not, **take her under the fore leg.**"

Bob kept his eyes fastened upon the bear, expecting every instant to see her fall stone dead beneath Lester's deadly aim; but the animal stood erect, closely regarding the intruders, and finally opening her mouth and showing a frightful array of teeth; she uttered another angry growl and moved slowly along the path. Then Bob looked toward his companion, wondering why he did not shoot. One glance showed him the reason. The hunter who had shot bears and panthers in Michigan, as ordinary hunters shoot squirrels, was overcome with terror. He stood in the middle of the path, holding fast to the stock of his rifle, the muzzle of which he had allowed to fall until it was buried in the mud. His face was as pale as death, and his eyes, which were fastened upon the savage beast before him, seemed to have grown to twice their usual size.

"Shoot! shoot!" cried Bob, in great dismay.
"She'll be right on top of us in a minute more."

But Lester was past shooting or doing any thing else. His fear had taken away all his strength, and even the knowledge that his life was in danger could not arouse him. Bob saw that something must be done at once. With trembling hands he raised his rifle to his shoulder, and drawing a hasty bead on the bear's breast, pulled the trigger. Without waiting to see the effect of his shot he threw down his gun, made one or two quick jumps backward and placing his hands upon a small sapling ascended it with the greatest agility.

A very few seconds sufficed to place him in the topmost branches, and when he found that he could go no higher he stopped and looked down to see what was going on below. The bear was just scrambling to her feet and the sight made Bob's heart bound with excitement and triumph, for then he knew that his bullet had not been thrown away. It had knocked the animal over; but the celerity of her movements and the hoarse growls she uttered proved that it had not reached a vital part, but had only made a wound severe enough to drive her almost frantic with rage. She dropped on all-fours

and came down the path at the top of her speed, and there was Lester standing as motionless as ever. Bob might have thought he was waiting for the animal to approach within five feet of him so that he could make that famous shot he had so often talked about, had he not seen his friend's pale face and noted the position in which he held his rifle.

"Run! run!" gasped Bob, who fully expected to see his companion pulled down and torn in pieces before his eyes. "Take to a tree—a sapling, and then you will be safe, for it is too small for the bear to climb!"

These words, and the sight of the fearful peril to which he was exposed, had the effect of arousing Lester from his lethargy. He let his rifle fall, and with even more agility than Bob had exhibited but a few seconds before, laid hold of a sapling and climbed it like a squirrel. He was none too quick in his movements, for the bear, clumsy as she looked, ran with surprising swiftness, and was at the foot of the sapling before Lester was fairly out of reach. Rising quickly on her hind feet she thrust one of her paws up into the branches, and the loud scream of terror Lester uttered frightened Bob so badly that he came near tumbling out of his perch. As soon

as he had taken a firmer hold of the branches he turned to look at his friend, and was greatly relieved to see that he had nothing to fear.

Lester realized his peril now, and was full of life and action. Seizing a branch above his head he drew up his feet and so escaped the savage clutch which the bear made at him. It was a narrow escape, and Lester's terror was so great that it was all he could do to climb still higher among the branches, and put himself in a place of safety. The slender sapling swayed and rocked as he worked his way upward, and Lester could not yet believe that the danger was over.

"O, Bob! Bob! what shall I do?" he managed to ask, as he clung to his frail support and looked down at the bear's ugly paw, which was now and then thrust up among the branches, altogether too close to his feet for comfort.

"Crawl up as high as you can and hold fast," was the reply. "The bear can't hurt you now."

"But how am I ever going to get home?" whined Lester.

"I don't know. We'll talk about that by and by. All we have to do now is to keep out of her reach.

Why didn't you shoot her as you used to shoot those bears up in Michigan?"

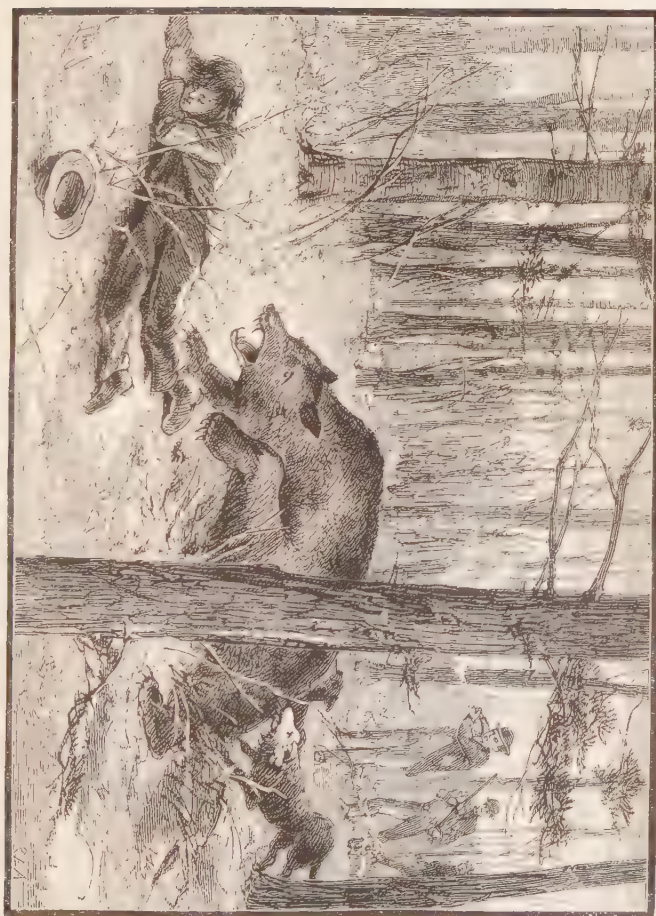
Before Lester had time to reply the attention of himself and companion was called to two new actors which suddenly appeared on the scene. One of them they would have recognised, if they had not been too badly frightened to recognise any thing. It was one of Don Gordon's hounds. He and his mate rushed straight at the bear, and in a second more a most terrific battle was in progress. The snarls and growls of the combatants made Lester's blood run cold. A moment later Don's voice was heard encouraging the dogs.

"Hi! hi! there," he shouted. "Take him, you rascals. Pull him down!"

The sharp report of a rifle followed his words, and the next thing Lester knew he was plunging headlong through the branches. The sapling in which he had taken refuge received a sudden and violent shock, as if some mighty body had been thrown against it, and Lester, whose extreme terror had rendered him almost helpless, lost his hold and fell to the ground. He caught frantically at the frail twigs as he passed through them, but they did not check his rapid descent, and he landed with a

concussion that at almost any other time would have rendered him senseless. But he did not mind his injuries now in the least. He jumped up the instant he touched the ground, and looked about him with the utmost consternation. There were three enraged brutes near him which were making the leaves fly in every direction as they rushed fiercely at one another, but his frightened eyes cheated him into believing that there were four times as many. Just as he gained his feet he saw twelve bears knock twelve dogs down with one stroke of their paws, and then these twelve bears turned and made at him with open mouths. He gave himself up for lost; but at that instant a roar like that of a cannon sounded close to his ear, and the twelve bears sank to the ground all in a heap. So did Lester who could endure the strain no longer. As he fell he saw twelve Don Gordons rush up with heavy double-barrel shot-guns in their hands, and each selecting his bear poured another charge of buckshot into the animal's head. But there was only one bear there—at least there was only one engaged in the fight—and only one Don Gordon.

The last time we saw Don was on the day David shipped his captured quails up the river on the



How I fear a bear's paw.

Emma Deane. He and his brother had labored faithfully to help their humble friend fill his contract, and when this work was done they were ready to accompany their father on a trip to Coldwater, which had long been talked of, and which the general had good-naturedly postponed in order that Don and Bert might assist David in making his enterprise successful. They intended to be absent a week or more. The general went on business, and Don and Bert to visit a young friend whom they had often entertained at their own house, and whose horses and hounds were the envy of all the boys in the country for miles around. They made the journey on horseback and were accompanied by their hounds. Don was armed with his trusty rifle, with which he hoped to make great havoc among the deer and bears that were so abundant in the county in which their friend Bob Harrington lived, while Bert carried his light fowling piece.

Bob Harrington, with whom Bert intended that he and Don should take up their abode in case they had gone on that hunting expedition which the reader will remember was broken up by the arrival of their cousins Clarence and Marshal Gordon, was a young Nimrod—not such a one as Lester Brigham,

but one whose exploits had been witnessed by all the men and boys in the settlement in which he lived. His rifle was the truest, his hounds were the staunchest, and his horse was the fleetest, and could take his fences the easiest of any in the county, not even excepting those of Mr. Harrington, Bob's father, who had been a hunter all his life. Bob never boasted that he would stand still and allow a bear to approach within five feet of him before he would shoot him, for he knew that that would be a harder test than his courage could endure ; but he was not afraid to walk up and finish any bear his dogs had hold of, and nearly every hunter in the neighborhood had seen him do it. The magnificent pair of antlers on which Don and Bert were accustomed to hang their gloves and riding-whips, and which were fastened to the wall of their room over their writing table, as well as the soft bearskin that served as a rug by the side of their bed, were presents from their friend Bob, and were only two out of a score or more of such articles which he had sent to his acquaintances all over the state. The animals that once wore these antlers and skins had all been brought low by Bob's own unerring rifle.

With such a hunter for a companion during a

week's shooting, the boys expected to learn something, especially Don, who told himself that before the visit was ended Master Bob would find that there was at least one boy in Mississippi who was not afraid to follow where he dared lead. And he made his resolution good. While Bert, with Bob's setter for a companion, was roaming about over Mr. Harrington's extensive plantation, making double shots on quail, woodcock and snipe, and Mrs. Harrington and the general were seated in their easy-chairs by the huge old-fashioned fire-place, talking over their business matters, Don and Bob were riding to the hounds, braving all sorts of weather, and bringing in so many trophies of their skill that the general and his host were astonished. No dinner in that house was considered complete without its wild turkey or saddle of venison; and as for such game as quails and woodcock, the family feasted on them until they were actually tired of them.

Don was given ample opportunity to test his skill with the rifle and exhibit his nerve in trying situations, and he finally became so accustomed to walking up and shooting a bear when the dogs had him "stretched" that he thought no more of it than he

did of bringing a squirrel out of the top of a hickory or stopping a woodcock on the wing. When the visit was ended and he returned to his home, he had more than one bearskin strapped behind his saddle, and, better than that, he carried with him a confidence in his own powers which ultimately proved to be the salvation of one who, had their situations been reversed, would have deserted him in the most cowardly manner.

The boys reached home one night after dark (it was the night of the same day on which David Evans received the money for his quails), and after relating to their mother and sisters as much of the week's history as they could crowd into two hours' conversation, they went up stairs and tumbled into bed. They were tired, of course, but still they had energy enough left to plan a campaign for the next day.

"We mustn't forget our bear-trap on the island," said Bert, as he settled himself snugly between the sheets.

"That's so," answered Don. "We'll go up there the first thing in the morning. If a bear is going to get into that trap at all, he has had plenty of time to do it. Whoever awakes first after day-

light must arouse the other. I say, Bert ! if I had had as much experience a few weeks ago as I have now, we couldn't have been driven off the island until we had found out what it was that uttered those horrid growls. I feel ashamed of myself when I think it was nobody but Godfrey Evans."

"But we didn't know it at the time," said Bert.

"Of course not. If we had we should have made him show himself. Just let him try that trick again if he dares."

As it happened neither one of the boys awoke at daylight. They were locked in a dreamless slumber until they were aroused by the ringing of the breakfast-bell. They dressed themselves with all haste, and with many exclamations of regret, hurried down stairs. They were not so impatient but that they could take time to eat a hearty meal ; but still they finished their breakfast before the rest of the family did, and asking to be excused ran off to get ready for their trip to the island. Don went up stairs after the guns and ammunition (he brought down his father's heavy double-barrel for Bert's use), and his brother went to the shop after the oars belonging to the canoe, and to call the two hounds which had accompanied them on their former expe-

dition up the bayou. As they did not intend to be absent more than three or four hours no lunch was provided for them.

The brothers met again at the jetty below the summer-house, where they found the canoe riding safely at its moorings. She was quickly loaded and pushed from the shore, and after an hour's easy rowing the young hunters found themselves within sight of Bruin's Island. As they approached it, Bert, who was steering, began to believe that if Godfrey Evans had not returned and taken up his abode in his old quarters, they would certainly find somebody or something else there, for the hounds, which up to this moment had been curled up in the bow, now arose to their feet, and after looking all about as if taking their bearings, turned their noses toward the island and eagerly snuffed the air. Did they remember their former experience there, or did the breeze, which was blowing straight down the bayou, bring some taint to their sensitive nostrils? Bert, who closely watched their movements, could not tell until he saw the long hair on the back of Carlo's neck begin to stand erect. Then the question was answered.

CHAPTER IV.

DON SHOWS HIS.

DON the hounds say there's something on the island," said Bert.

Don ceased rowing, faced about and looked at his favorites, whose actions he had learned to read like a book. They were beginning to be very uneasy.

"Yes, sir," said Don, his countenance brightening, and his eye lighting up with excitement, "there's something there. I hope it is a bear, for if it should turn out to be nobody but Godfrey Evans I should be provoked. You needn't be afraid," he added, with a hasty glance at his brother's sober face. "If it is a bear he can't take us unawares while the dogs are with us. They'll find him and show us where he is."

"I couldn't shoot him if I should see him," said Bert, drawing a long breath. "You know that while we were over on Coldwater all my shooting

was done on small game. I never saw a wild bear in my life."

"You needn't shoot him. In fact, I'd rather you wouldn't try; for if you were in the least excited you might shoot the dogs, and I wouldn't have them hurt for all the bears in Mississippi. You know that all those hunters in Africa have after-riders—men who keep close behind them, and hand them a second gun if they need it. You can do the same by me. If I fail to make a dead shot with my rifle, be ready to give me your double barrel. There are buckshot enough in it to kill any bear I ever saw. Keep close at my heels, and the bear shan't hurt you, unless he kills or disables me first," added Don, who took pride in the fact that he was able to act as protector to his weak and timid brother.

"But I don't want him to hurt you, either," said Bert.

"I don't intend that he shall. I am not as much afraid of those fellows as I was a few weeks ago, for I have learned that a quick eye and steady hand are all that are needed to bring one safely through."

Don laid out all his strength on the oars again, and the canoe rapidly approached the island; but before it had gone many yards the report of a rifle

rang out on the air, being followed a moment later by a rustling in the cane which the boys knew was not made by the breeze, and then by loud and rapidly-spoken words which the young hunters could not understand. The words were uttered by Bob Owens, who was calling upon his companion to save himself by flight. Then there was a loud shout of terror, followed by more rustling in the cane, and by repeated cries from some one who was evidently in great distress or threatened by some terrible danger. The hounds bayed loudly in response, Bert's cheek blanched, and Don rested on his oars and looked first at the island and then at his brother in great astonishment. His inactivity, however, lasted but for a moment. The voices and cries of distress continued to come from the island, and Don, with the remark that there was some one there who was in need of assistance, bent to his oars with redoubled energy.

The canoe moved swiftly along the shore of the island until it reached a point opposite the path leading to the little clearing in which the bear trap was located, and then Bert turned it toward the shore, and Don with a few strong pulls drove the bow deep into the mud. The hounds, hardly waiting for the boat to

become stationary, sprang ashore and were out of sight in an instant. Don, shouting directions to his favorites, followed as fast as he was able, and Bert, with his double barrel on his shoulder, kept close to his brother's side, wondering all the while at the courage he exhibited in doing so. But one never knows how much nerve he has until he is put to the test. Perhaps that pale, quiet friend of yours, who looks as though he had scarcely strength enough to lift his heavy satchelful of books, and who always turns and walks meekly away whenever the great, hulking bully of the school says a harsh word to him, would, if placed in a situation of extreme danger, stand his ground and show the greatest coolness and courage, while that same bully would run for his life.

The young hunters ran swiftly along the path, but before they had made many steps they heard a great crashing in the cane, accompanied by a chorus of snarls and growls that were enough to frighten almost any one. But they did not frighten Don now. He had heard such sounds so often of late that they did not affect his nerves any more than the baying of his own hounds would have done. He ran on faster than ever, and a few more steps brought

him around an abrupt bend in the path. There he stopped, greatly astonished at what he saw—a battle between his hounds and a bear. It was not the battle that astonished him, but the size of the animal with which his favorites were contending. It was the largest he had ever seen in all his hunting. It was almost as large as the one which had slaughtered so many dogs in that same canebrake a few years before. She was standing on her hind feet, striking viciously at the dogs, which, altogether too wise to close with so huge an antagonist, were bounding about her, biting her first in one place and then in another, and keeping her spinning around like a top.

Don took in the situation at a glance, and then his rifle slowly and steadily arose to his shoulder, the sight covering the bear's neck. He fired at the proper moment and the animal fell to the ground, being assisted in her fall by the hounds, which, encouraged by the presence of their master, seized her at the same instant and pulled her with great violence against the nearest sapling. The result was not a little bewildering to Don and his brother. A loud cry of alarm sounded among the branches over their heads, and they looked up just in time to see some heavy body descending through the air. It struck

the ground, from which it seemed to bound like a ball, and when it came to an upright position, as it did a moment later, Don saw that it was Lester Brigham, and not a bear, as he had at first supposed. His astonishment was so great that for a moment he could neither move nor speak ; but Bert could and did, for he saw that the boy was in danger.

“Look out, Lester ! Run for your life !” he cried.

Aroused by the exclamation, Don turned his eyes from Lester to the bear, and saw that the animal had regained her feet, and having knocked down one of the hounds was rushing upon Lester with open mouth. Don was frightened now, for he believed that something dreadful was about to happen ; but his nerve did not fail him nor did he hesitate an instant. Dropping his empty rifle, and seizing the double barrel which Bert promptly handed him, already cocked, he drew the weapon to his shoulder, and by a hasty snap-shot saved Lester's life. The bear and her intended victim both dropped at the report, the one mortally wounded and the other in a dead faint. So closely together did they fall that the bear, in her death struggle, tore Lester's clothing with her claws. Bert at once dashed forward

to drag him out of danger, while Don ended the battle by firing another charge of buckshot into the animal's head. Lester could now say that he had been within five feet of a bear, and tell nothing but the truth.

"Well, this beats anything I ever heard of," said Don, as soon as he had made sure that the bear was dead. "How do you suppose Lester got here? I didn't see any boat on the beach, did you?"

"No," answered Bert; "I was too badly frightened to see anything."

"But there's a boat there all the same," said a voice.

Don and Bert looked wonderingly at each other. "Who's that?" demanded the latter, after a moment's hesitation.

"Bob Owens!"

The rustling among the branches which accompanied these words told the brothers where to look to find the speaker. They walked toward the foot of a neighboring sapling, and, looking upward, saw Bob Owens coming down. His pale face and trembling hands showed that he, as well as Lester, had sustained something of a fright.

"Why, Bob, what in the world brought you here?" exclaimed Bert.

"I came up to find the bear that drove you and Don off the island a few days ago," replied Bob. "I found her, too." He added, suddenly pausing in his descent as an angry growl fell upon his ear. It was uttered by one of the hounds, which recognised in Bob the robber who had been compelled to take refuge on the roof of the negro cabin. He looked up at the boy and showed him the teeth he had come so near using on him that night.

"Bose, behave yourself!" exclaimed Don, sharply. "Come down, Bob, and tell us all about it."

Before Bob could comply, a wild, shrill cry, which, during her life, would have excited the old bear almost to frenzy, sounded from the direction of the clearing, which was a few rods deeper in the cane. The boys all knew what it was. Bob uttered an exclamation of astonishment, and began to mount among the branches of the sapling again, while Bert put fresh cartridges into his old double-barrel, and Don ran back after his rifle, which he began to reload with all haste. While he was thus engaged his eye fell upon Lester's prostrate form.

"I say, Bob!" he exclaimed, "you had better come down and see to your friend here."

"What's the matter with him?" asked Bob, from his perch.

"He has fainted. He was frightened by the bear, and perhaps injured by his fall from the tree. I don't blame him for being frightened. I don't suppose he ever saw a bear before in his life."

"Ha!" exclaimed Bob, "he says he has shot more of them than you ever saw."

Don did not believe that Lester told the truth when he said this; but he could not stop to argue the point just then, for his mind was too fully occupied with thoughts of what was yet to come. He patched the ball very carefully, and, as he drew the ramrod to drive it home, he said:

"Come down here, and take care of him, Bob. Throw some water in his face, and I think he will come out all right. You will find a cup in our boat."

"I guess not," replied Bob. "I've no business down there. Don't you know that that was the cry of a cub we heard just now?"

"Of course I do. But what of it?"

"Don't you know that if the old one is anywhere around you are in danger down there?"

"I don't think the old one will trouble us. She's dead."

"But suppose the father of the family should be in the neighborhood? Take to a tree, quick!" exclaimed Bob, as the cub once more set up his shrill cry. "Bring your rifle up with you, and if the other old one comes around you can shoot him easy enough."

"That's not my way of doing business," replied Don, somewhat surprised at the proposition. "Why, Bob, I thought you had hunted bears all your life."

"So I have; but I always had a good horse under me, and plenty of dogs to back me up. You'll never again catch me on foot around where one of these animals is. I've had enough of it to-day."

The loud baying of the hounds, which had dashed down the path as soon as the cry of the cub fell upon their ears, now echoed through the woods, and Don having by this time loaded his rifle, ran toward the clearing, leaving Bob to help his friend Lester, or not, just as he pleased. Bert, in his capacity of gun-bearer, kept close behind his brother as he ran.

A few rapid steps brought the hunters to the edge of the clearing, and there they stopped to reconnoitre the ground before going farther. They did not

want to run into the clutches of another old bear if they could help it. The hounds were standing on their hind legs with their fore feet resting against the body of a small tree, looking up into the branches and baying loudly. Don looked, too, and saw a young bear about the size of a Newfoundland dog perched in the fork.

“O, Bert,” exclaimed Don, “why didn’t we think to bring an axe with us? It wouldn’t be any trouble at all to cut the tree down and take that fellow alive.”

Before Bert could say anything in reply, the hounds suddenly left the tree, and dashing across the clearing, threw themselves against the trap, toward which Don had not before thought to look, and thrusting their noses between the logs, made desperate efforts to reach something on the inside; while whatever it was on the inside ran about and squalled as if greatly alarmed. Then Don saw that the top of the trap was down. He ran quickly to it and looking between the logs saw crouching in the furthest corner the mate to the young bear in the tree. The huge animal he had shot in the path was the mother of the two cubs.

“We’ve got two of them,” he exclaimed in great

glee. "Are we not in luck? Don't you remember father told us that if we could trap a cub Silas Jones would give us twenty dollars for him? We'll have forty dollars to give David. We don't need the money and he does."

"Of course he does," replied Bert. "We'll leave the dogs here and go home and get help."

"That's the idea. We shall need plenty of it, too, for that bear is pretty heavy, and it will take a strong force to drag her to the bayou and put her into the boat. Here, boys," he added, calling to his dogs and placing his hand on the tree in which the young bear had taken refuge, "keep your eyes on him and don't let him come down."

The hounds understood him and seemed quite willing to remain and watch the game. They had passed many a night in the woods guarding a coon tree, and we know how faithfully they and the rest of Don's pack watched Lester and Bob while they were on the top of the negro cabin. All they had to do was to "keep their eyes" on the bear in the tree; the one in the trap could not possibly escape.

Don now shouldered his rifle and retraced his steps along the path, followed by his faithful gun-bearer. When they reached the scene of the fight

they found Lester Brigham sitting up with his back supported against a tree and Bob Owens kneeling beside him in the act of handing him a cup of water.

After the brothers ran toward the clearing Bob waited and listened, expecting every instant to hear the sounds of another desperate struggle; but as nothing but the laying of the hounds came to his ears, he made up his mind that there were no more old bears about, and finally mustered up courage enough to go to the assistance of his companion as Don had suggested. He made his way to the ground and stopping long enough to take a good look at the huge animal which had been the cause of so much alarm to him, he ran up the path to see how Lester was getting on. The latter was beginning to show some signs of returning animation, and the cup of water that Bob dashed into his face brought all his faculties back to him. He opened his eyes and seemed instantly to recall all the exciting incidents that had so recently occurred. He jumped to his feet with a cry of alarm, but was so weak that if Bob had not caught him in his arms he would have fallen to the ground. Bob propped him up against a tree and after assuring him that the bear was dead, hurried off to the bayou after another cup of water.

"How do you feel, Lester?" asked Don, with some anxiety.

"All done up," was the scarcely audible reply. "I feel as if every bone in my body was broken. I'll tell you what it is: if I had been in practice, as I was when I took my last hunt in Michigan, you wouldn't have had a chance to shoot that bear. I've killed dozens of them; but this one came upon me so suddenly that I couldn't do anything."

"I guess you are all right," thought Don, with a sly glance at his brother. "As long as a boy can tell falsehoods there's not much the matter with him." Then aloud he asked: "Can we be of any assistance to you?"

"O, no," replied Lester, who wanted nothing to do with the boys he had wronged. "I shall be able to walk in a few minutes and Bob will take care of me."

"Very well; then we will go home. We must have help to get this old bear into a boat, and besides there are two cubs back there in the clearing that we want to capture alive. They are worth twenty dollars apiece, and the money belongs to Dave Evans."

"Dave Evans!" sneered Lester, as soon as the

brothers were out of sight in the cane. "There's nobody in this settlement but Dave Evans."

"Twenty dollars apiece," said Bob, pulling off his hat and dashing it spitefully upon the ground. "That makes forty dollars, which added to a hundred and sixty makes two hundred dollars. Wouldn't I have a breech-loader if I had that amount of money in my pocket? But I haven't got a cent, and here's this miserable fellow rich already. I wish I dared go back there and shoot those cubs. I would if the hounds were not there. I'd shoot the dogs, too, if I thought Don wouldn't suspect me."

Meanwhile Don was laying out all his strength on the oars, and the canoe was moving rapidly down the bayou. When it reached the lake, and was passing Godfrey's cabin, Don and his brother, who had not seen the boy trapper since their return, and consequently knew nothing of his good fortune, looked all around for him, intending, if they saw him, to tell him that he had some valuable property up in the woods which was waiting to be secured. "I don't see any thing of him," said Bert, "and we are in too great a hurry to stop and hunt him up."

"Never mind," said Don. "He'll be around as soon as he finds out that we are at home. Now.

Bert, if you will make the canoe fast and put our guns in the sail-boat, and get her all ready for the start, I'll run up to the house and ask father if he will let a couple of the darkies go with us after those bears. We don't want any lunch, do we?"

No, Bert didn't want any. There was too much sport in prospect, and he couldn't eat a mouthful until it was all over.

When the canoe reached the wharf Don sprang out, and Bert was preparing to make her fast at her usual moorings, when they heard a loud shout, and looking toward the road saw David Evans running along the beach. "I'll wait until I hear how he succeeded with his quails," said Don.

"And won't he be surprised when he learns that he will have forty dollars more in his pocket to-night," said Bert. "David ought to be very happy and contented now, for he is getting on nicely."

"Well, he doesn't act to me like a very happy boy this morning," said Don, in a low tone, as David came nearer. "There's something the matter with him. He doesn't usually hang his head that way."

Bert, having made the canoe fast to the tree, straightened up, and when he had taken a good look at David, told himself that his brother was right.

There was something the matter with him. While he was wondering what new misfortune had fallen to the lot of the boy trapper, Don called out:

"We've just been talking about you, Dave. How goes the battle?"

David tried to answer, but could not utter a word. Don, believing that it was because he was out of breath after his rapid run, continued:

"You've had plenty of time to hear from those quails, and I suppose you've got a pocketful of money now, haven't you?"

David had by this time approached so close to the brothers that they could see that his face was very pale, and that his eyes were red and swollen with weeping. He stepped upon the shore end of the jetty, and throwing himself down upon it, covered his face with his hands and rocked back and forth, sobbing violently. Don and his brother looked at each other in great surprise, and at length the former managed to ask: "What's the matter?"

"O, Don!" cried David.

"Well, I can't make any thing of that reply," exclaimed the boy. "Tell me what's the matter with you. Hasn't your money come?"

"O, yes, it came," sobbed David.

These words, and the tone in which they were spoken, let Don into the secret of his friend's trouble. Impatient to know the worst at once, he walked up and caught David by the arm. "Out with it," said he. "Where's your money now?"

"I worked so hard for it," cried David, "and mother needed it so much; but now it's gone—all gone. I've lost every red cent of it!"

Bert drew a long breath, and seated himself in the canoe with an air which said that this last misfortune was altogether too much for him to stand up under, while Don pushed back his sleeves, placed his hands on his hips, and looked down at the weeping boy.

CHAPTER V.

GODFREY VISITS THE CABIN.

MORE'N a hundred and sixty-four dollars, an' it made a wad as big as that thar!" said Dan Evans, looking at his wrist as he hurried through the woods. He opened his eyes and fairly gasped for breath as he thought of it. His ideas of money, as we know, were not very clear, and he was of the opinion that a roll of greenbacks as large as one could conveniently grasp in his hand, must be utterly inexhaustible. "An' that thar lectle Dave of our'n done made 'em all by trappin' quails! That's what I'm goin' to be now—a trapper! Then won't I have good clothes, an' a circus-hoss, an' a sail-boat, an' a fish-pole, an' one of them guns that break in two in the middle? How extonished the folks will be when they see me goin' to church with a straw hat and shiny boots on!"

This was the way Dan talked to himself, while

he was running through the woods toward his father's camp, after his interview with the planter, which we have recorded in the first chapter. His astonishment was almost unbounded. How glad he was, now that he had followed his father's instructions, and let David's traps alone; and how amazed and delighted Godfrey would be when he heard the news!

Dan knew just where to go to find his father. He was still occupying his old camp—the one he made after Don Gordon's hounds drove him off the island—and thither Dan hurried with all the speed he could command. But still he could not go half fast enough to suit him. It seemed to him that the astounding information he had just received would work some dreadful injury to him if he did not communicate it to his father at once. The nearer he approached the camp the faster he ran; and when, at last, he burst into the presence of his father, who was stretched out beside a blazing fire, enjoying a pipeful of the store-tobacco which Dan had purchased for him a few days before, he was so nearly exhausted that he could scarcely speak; but, after a good many questions, and a few threats, from the impatient Godfrey, he managed to repeat

the substance of his conversation with the planter. His father listened with mouth and eyes wide open, and when, at last, he began to comprehend the matter, he jumped to his feet, and danced about like one demented.

"Whoop!" yelled Godfrey, so loudly that the woods rang again. "More 'n a hundred an' sixty dollars! No more toilin', an' workin', an' slavin' for me. My fort'n's made."

"Your'n!" repeated Dan.

"Mine *an'* your'n, Dannie," replied Godfrey, seizing his son's hand, and giving it a grip and a shake that made Dan writhe with pain. "Yer a good boy, Dannie. Ye hain't like that thar mean, sneakin' Dave, who goes off an' 'arns a pocketful of greenbacks, and gives 'em all to his man, and none to his pap, but ye've stuck by me, an' been a dootiful son, and now ye'll see what I'll do by ye!"

"What be ye goin' to do, pap?" asked Dan.

"I'm goin' to have them thar greenbacks afore I sleep this night," was Godfrey's decided reply. "The money's mine. It don't b'long to Dave, not by no means, 'kase he's got no rights in law. I'm his pap, an' kin take his 'arnin's till he's twenty-one years old, an' nobody can't say nothing to me."

"If it hadn't been for me ye wouldn't a knowed nothing 'bout this money, pap," said Dan, "an' I don't want ye to forgit it."

"I won't, Dannie," said Godfrey, giving his son's hand another cordial shake.

"Ye done said ye'd give me half, I reckon, didn't ye, pap?"

"I did; an' what I say I allers stand to. Yer circus-hoss, an' yer fish-pole what ye kin take all in pieces an' carry under yer arm, an' yer shiny boots, an' all them other nice things ye have been wantin' so long, are comin' to ye now. When ye get 'em I'd jest like to see you alongside of them pale-faced youngsters up to the general's. Yer a heap smarter an' better lookin' nor they be, Dannie. You hear me?"

Dan grinned, and Godfrey having lost all the tobacco out of his pipe while he was dancing about, filled up again, and sat down for a fresh smoke. His excitement had not in the least abated, and neither had Dan's. They built air-castles and laid plans for the future, until the afternoon began to draw to a close, and then Godfrey announced that it was time to prepare for business. He covered up the fire, threw on his powder-horn and bullet-pouch,

and, taking his long rifle on his shoulder, led the way, through the woods, toward his cabin, closely followed by Dan, whose bright dreams grew still brighter as the time for their fulfilment drew nearer.

As they approached the cabin they heard the sound of an axe, and, when they came near enough to peer through the bushes, they saw David in the yard chopping wood. When his task was finished, he put the axe away, and began carrying the wood into the cabin, and, while he worked, he whistled merrily. He was happy, as he had reason to be. When the last stick of wood had been deposited by the side of the fire-place, and David had walked two or three times around the cabin, and looked sharply in every direction, to make sure that Dan was not loitering about, ready to play his old game of eaves-dropping, the Boy Trapper went in, and closed and fastened the door.

"Now, mother," said he, "where shall we hide these greenbacks? A hound on a deer's trail is not sharper than Dan is when he scents money; and if he finds out that I have received my pay he will want me to divide with him, and if I don't do it, he'll make such a fuss that we can't stay in the

house with him. We have nothing to fear from father now."

"We must take good care to keep our secret from Daniel's knowledge," said Mrs. Evans. "I don't see how he is going to find it out. I shan't tell him, and neither will you."

"Of course not; but there were three or four men in the store when Mr. Jones paid me the money," said David, taking down a rusty tin box from the rough mantel over the fire-place. "I don't know who they were, for I was too excited to know anybody. If they don't speak of it, no one will know that I have got the money; but I can't afford to run any risks. I must hide it somewhere until Don comes back, and then I'll give it to him to keep for me. It will be safe in his hands. Now, mother, let's see if it is all here. I didn't count it when Silas gave it to me."

David and his mother had spent the most of the afternoon in talking over their plans and calculating how long, with the economy they intended to practice, their little fortune would suffice to supply them with clothing and provisions. It was a large sum in David's eyes, but Mrs. Evans knew that it would

not last for ever, and she had labored hard to impress this fact upon the boy's mind.

David turned the contents of the box into his mother's lap, and as they were not accustomed to the handling of money, it took them both nearly a quarter of an hour to straighten out the bills and put the various denominations together, so that they could be easily counted. They were very much interested in their work and little dreamed that during the most of the time they were thus engaged two faces, pale with excitement, were pressed close against one of the cracks in the rear wall of the cabin, and two pairs of eager eyes were watching their every movement.

"One hundred and sixty-four dollars and fifty cents," said David, as he rolled up the money, replaced it in the tin box and put the cover on it. "It is all here, and now what are we going to do with it until Don comes home? Think up a good place to hide it, mother."

At this moment one of the two eager pairs of eyes was suddenly withdrawn from the crack between the logs, a tall, gaunt figure moved with quick and noiseless footsteps around the end of the cabin and a strong hand was laid upon the latch. David and

his mother started up in great alarm, and the boy, with a presentiment that his money was in danger, hastily slipped it under the foot of the "shake down" in which he slept. Again the door was tried and a familiar voice exclaimed:

"Shettin' me outen my own house, be ye? What be ye doin' it fur, I axes ye?"

"It's father," whispered David with a sinking at his heart; and while his mother was advancing to undo the fastenings of the door he quickly snatched up his box again, and raising one of the stones which formed the hearth, he put the box under it and stood upon it to force the stone back to its place.

The fastenings being undone the door was thrown open and the master of the house, pale and haggard, stalked into the room. His wife had seen him look so once before, and that was when he was hiding from the Union soldiers.

"Why, Godfrey!" exclaimed Mrs. Evans. "I am so glad you have come back."

"Glad, be ye?" cried her husband, turning fiercely upon her and shaking off the hand she had laid upon his arm. "I reckon ye be. Here's me been a layin' out all these cold nights, a freezin' and a starvin', an' ye never sent me a blanket to kiver

myself up with, nor a bite of grub to eat. Glad, be ye? Sich talk don't go down, ole woman!"

"Why, father, there's only one blanket in the house," said Mrs. Evans.

"Then why didn't ye send me no grub?" demanded Godfrey, angrily.

"I didn't know where to find you," was the meek reply.

"Wal, ye could a hunted me up, I reckon, if ye had wanted to see me very bad. But if I am a layin' out, I'm boss here yet. This is my house, an' so's every thing what's into it, an' I don't want none on ye to forgit it."

"We know it is all yours, father," said Mrs. Evans. "You may have the blanket if you want it. I can get along without it."

"I don't want it, an' dog-gone my buttons I won't have it," shouted Godfrey, throwing his arms wildly about his head. "I'm rich enough to buy more an' better. Dave, hand out them hundred an' sixty dollars, an' be quick about it. You hear me?"

A deep silence followed this demand. Neither David nor his mother could make any reply to it, and while Godfrey was waiting for them to say something, he shook all over as if he had been seized

with the ague. His excitement and impatience were so great that he could not hold himself still.

"Dave, does ye hear yer pap a speakin' to ye?" Godfrey almost yelled. "Whar's them thar greenbacks, I axes ye? Hand 'em out here quicker'n a streak of chain lightnin'."

"O, Godfrey!" exclaimed Mrs. Evans, recovering her power of speech by a great effort, "you surely would not rob David of the money that he has worked so hard for! It is his, for he earned it. You have no claim upon it, for you didn't help him."

"Ole woman!" cried Godfrey, "Dave haint twenty-one year ole yit. Them thar greenbacks is in this house, kase I seed 'em not more'n a minute ago, an' I'll have 'em if I have to bust up the hul consarn. Dave, if ye don't want to see me turn myself loose hand 'em out here."

"I'll die first," was the boy's firm reply. "If you want any money go to work and earn some, as I did. That's the honest way."

"Honest!" yelled Godfrey, seizing the "shake down" and lifting it from the floor. "Whoop! that there money is mine, kase yer my son an' I'm yer pap. I'm boss here, too, an' that gives me the right

to handle every cent what comes into the house. If ye won't hand 'em out peaceable, I'll look for 'em myself; and ye won't find much furnitur in the shantee arter I get through lookin', nuther. You hear me?"

"Don't waste no time with them bed-clothes, pap," cried a voice from the rear of the cabin. "Shove Dave off'n that rock an' hist it up. Then ye'll find 'em, kase I seed him put 'em thar!"

Up to this time David had stood motionless on the hearth-stone, revolving in his mind a thousand wild schemes for saving his money. He closely watched every move his father made, hoping that the latter would go to the other end of the cabin and give him an opportunity to raise the stone, seize the box, and rush out into the darkness; but Godfrey, who probably suspected some such design on David's part, was careful to keep between him and the door. There was but one hope to which the boy could cling, and that was that his father might not find the money. The box had been pressed into the soft earth, and now David noticed, with no little satisfaction, that the heavy stone was as firmly and evenly settled in its place as it was before he raised it. It is possible that Godfrey might have overlooked this hiding-

place in his frantic search, had it not been for the fact that he had a sharp-eyed ally close at hand.

Dan still kept his face pressed close against the crack in the rear wall of the cabin, and he saw what David did with his money. He did not want to say anything about it, however, for he feared that if he did, he would never be permitted to enter the cabin again. He did not want to become a hermit, as his father was. It was a part of his plans to live at home and enjoy morning gallops on his circus horse, and evening trips about the lake in his fine sail-boat. All the nice things he intended to purchase would be useless to him if he were compelled to live in the woods, as Godfrey did. He meant to conduct himself in such a manner that his mother and David would not suspect that he was in any way concerned in the robbery ; but when he saw that his father was looking in the wrong place for the money, his excitement and impatience got the better of him, and he shouted out his advice before he knew it.

“Shove Dave off’n that thar rock an’ hist it up,” said he. “Then ye’ll find ’em, kase I seed him put ’em thar !”

Godfrey was prompt to act upon the suggestion, and David was as prompt to take the warning.

With a wild cry of alarm the boy sprang off the rock, and stooping quickly made a frantic effort to secure his treasure; but the stone was firmly imbedded in its place, and his fingers seemed to have lost all their strength. His first attempt failed, and before he could make a second his father seized him by the collar, and with a quick, strong jerk sent him backward almost to the other end of the cabin. Then fiercely throwing off his wife, who tried to seize him by the arm, Godfrey pulled up the stone, and, with a loud shout of triumph, seized the box, sprang through the door, and disappeared. He ran around the end of the cabin, where he was joined by Dan, and the two fled as if all the officers of the law in the county were close at their heels. Like spectres they glided through the woods, never once pausing or saying a word to each other, until they reached the camp. Then they breathed easier.

Godfrey at once proceeded to rake over the coals and mend the fire, and Dan noticed that his hands trembled violently. "Wal, pap, we done it, didn't we?" said the boy, who was the first to speak.

"Yes, sar, we did; and now I'll take a smoke."

While Godfrey was filling and lighting his pipe, Dan threw himself on the ground beside the fire

and looked steadily into the flames, evidently very much occupied with his own thoughts. He was not as well pleased with the result of their expedition as he had expected to be. He could not imagine how he was going to enjoy his money, now that he had got it. In spite of his firm determination to keep in the back-ground, and let his father do all the work and bear all the blame, he had exposed himself, and now his mother and David knew that he had had as much to do with the robbery as Godfrey himself. Dan was sorry for that, and would have given almost anything to be able to undo the mischief he had done. But, after all, he was the possessor of a larger pile of greenbacks than he had ever expected to own, and in that he found a few grains of consolation.

"Pap," said he, suddenly, "we haint seed that dar money yet, and my eyes is just achin' for a look at it!"

Without saying a word, Godfrey drew the box from his pocket, and Dan arose and took a seat by his side. Godfrey took off the cover, and exposed David's treasure to Dan's gaze: but, when the latter stretched his hand to touch the bills, his father

hastily snatched away the box, and held it out of his reach.

"What made ye do that for?" demanded the boy, greatly astonished.

"Kase I'm yer pap; that's why," was the satisfactory answer.

"Wal, if it hadn't been for me ye wouldn't a know'd nothing about them thar greenbacks," said Dan, angrily. "I done told ye all about 'em, an' if I aint got a right to tech 'em, I'd like to know what's the reason why."

"Ye've been a good boy, Dannie, an' I'm goin' to do well by ye. Ye jest see ef I don't."

"Ye done told me that when we got 'em ye would give me half."

"Certinly I done told ye so, an' I allers stand to what I say."

"Wal, I reckon ye might as well count 'em out now as any time," said Dan, who did not at all like his father's tone and manner. "This fire gives a good light, an' ye kin see by it. How much be I goin' to get of them hundred and sixty dollars?"

"As much as ninety dollars, mebbe. I can't jest exactly tell, 'kase I haint figured it as yet."

"Ye might as well figure it up now, I reckon,

mightn't ye? What be ye doin' that for?" cried Dan, when he saw his father replace the cover, and put the box back into his pocket.

"It'll be safe thar, Dannie," was the reply.

"But I kin take keer on my own money," Dan almost shouted; "an' dog-gone my buttons, I want it *now*. Count it out here, I tell ye."

"Not by no manner of means," answered Godfrey.

Dan was thunderstruck. He could scarcely believe that his ears were not deceiving him. He began to think he could see what his father had determined upon. "Aint—aint you goin' to give me my share?" he managed to ask.

"No, I aint a goin' to give it to ye no more, 'kase I done give it to you onct, an' I allers stand to what I say. Half of this money is yourn already, but ye'd best let yer poor ole pap take keer on it fur ye, Dannie."

"Whoop!" shrieked Dan, jumping up and knocking his heels together.

"What do a boy like yerself know about money?" continued Godfrey. "Yer pap is older an' knows more'n ye do; an' it's the properest thing that he

should take keer on it for ye. I'll keep it in the box with mine, an' then it will be safe."

Dan's rage was wonderful to behold. Was this the reward he was to receive for his services? He had acted as a faithful scout for his father, and kept him posted in all that was going on in the settlement. More than that, he had, as he believed, destroyed all his chances of living at home again, and he had done it all on the strength of his father's promise that, when David's money had been secured, he (Dan) should have half of it for his own. Dan understood by that, that the money was to be placed in his own hands, and that he would be allowed to do as he pleased with it; but, when he found that his father put a different construction on their agreement, he was almost beside himself with fury. He danced about the camp like an insane boy, knocking his heels together, clapping his hands, and yelling at the top of his voice; and all the while Godfrey sat smoking, with a most provoking smile on his face, but still keeping a wary eye on the boy's movements, for fear that his rage might lead him to attempt some mischief.

"Taint no arthly use to take on that thar way, Dannie," said his father, as soon as the boy's wild

yells had subsided, so that he could make himself heard. "I don't conspute that the money's yourn, do I?"

"Then, if it is mine, why don't you hand it out here, like a man had oughter do?" cried Dan.

"Haint I done told ye that it's the best and properest thing that I should take keer on it fur ye?"

"I don't want ye to take keer on it for me, an' ye shan't. It's nothin' but a plan ye've made up all outen yer own head to steal the hul on it, an' cheat me outen my share; but ye shan't do that nuther. Now, pap, I'll tell ye what's the gospel truth 'bout them thar greenbacks: If ye don't count me out my ninety dollars right now, I'll—I'll——"

Dan suddenly paused, and took his seat on the opposite side of the fire. If it had been daylight, so that his father could see his compressed lips and the glitter in his eye, he might have been more cautious, for he would have known that Dan had determined on some desperate course of action.

"What was ye goin' to say, sonny?" asked Godfrey, with the most exasperating coolness.

"I was goin' to say jest this yere, pap," replied Dan, who was hardly able to control himself, "I'll give ye a week to think on it, an' then, if ye don't

give me my share of them hundred and sixty dollars, thar'll be the biggest furse in this settlement that thar's been since the wah!"

"What'll ye do, Dannie?"

"I'll do something ye won't like. Ye hear me?"

"Wal, I'll think about it," answered Godfrey, who knew very well that his hopeful son meant all he said, "an' if I find that yer an' amazin' good boy, an' know how to take keer of money, I'll give ye yer share to keep for yerself."

"That'll be when the sky falls an' we ketch black-birds," said Dan, to himself. "I know ye, pap, an' ye think ye know me, too; but ye'll find out afore mornin' that ye don't."

But Dan said nothing aloud. In sullen silence he arranged a few withered boughs for a bed, threw himself down upon them, and with his cap for a pillow, prepared to go to sleep. Godfrey remained by the fire for an hour or two longer, smoking and meditating, and when he became sleepy he stretched himself out where he sat and almost immediately sank into a heavy slumber.

Toward midnight the fire began to burn low, and Dan, with a snort and a start, sat up on his bed of boughs and looked about him. He stretched his

arms and yawned loudly, and with a great deal more noise than seemed to be necessary, got up and mended the fire, furtively watching his father out of the corner of his eye as he did so. "He's all right," muttered Dan, with great satisfaction. "I reckoned mebbe he was 'possumin',' but when he puffs his under lip in and out that thar way, he's fast asleep."

As these thoughts passed through Dan's mind he suddenly ceased his operations at the fire, and approaching the sleeper with a stealthy step, kneeled down beside him and pulled out his jack-knife. He had noticed that it was only after a good deal of hard work that his father was able to push the box containing David's money into his pocket, and that after he got it in, it was equally hard to get it out again. Dan had determined to possess that box and its contents, and knowing that he would run a great risk if he attempted to force it out of his father's pocket, he hit upon the easier and safer plan of cutting it out. This he did with one swift, careful stroke with his knife, and Godfrey was none the wiser for it. The box fell out into Dan's hand, and he lost no time in transferring it to his own pocket.

"Thar, dog gone ye!" whispered Dan, trembling

all over with excitement and apprehension. "Ye wouldn't give me my ninety dollars, but tried to cheat me outhen 'em, sayin' ye was a goin' to take keer on 'em fur me. I'll take keer on the hul on it now, an' not a dollar of it do ye see again. Didn't I say that ye'd find out afore mornin' that ye didn't know me?"

So saying Dan shook his fist at the unconscious Godfrey, and crossing over to the other side of the fire with noiseless footsteps, picked up his rifle and crept away into the woods.

CHAPTER VI.

BOB IS ASTONISHED.

NOW Dave," said Don, kindly, "brace up and be a man. Don't take it so much to heart."

"It is easy enough to say 'brace up,' " sobbed David, "but how would you feel if you were in my place?"

"I don't know, for you have not yet told me just what is the matter. Now let us hear the whole story from the beginning," said Don, seating himself on the wharf beside the weeping boy.

David wiped away his tears, choked down his sobs by an effort, and proceeded to give a very disconnected account of the incidents that had happened at the cabin the night before. Don's cheek flushed while he listened. If David had asked him now how he would feel if he were in the same situation, he would have received a prompt and decided reply. Don felt as if he would like to break Godfrey's head and Dan's, too.

"Mother and I never slept a wink last night," continued David. "We did not even go to bed. We could only talk and cry. Mother says we can't do anything about it, for father has the right to take all my earnings."

"Whew!" whistled Don. "That's a fact." He had not thought of it, however, until that moment. He had been telling himself that if there were officers enough in the county to find Godfrey, he should be arrested at once; but now he saw that there were difficulties in the way.

"And another bad thing about it is that I owe Silas Jones a grocery bill, and haven't a cent to pay it with," added David. "I ought to have paid him when he gave me the money, but I did not think of it. I was too impatient to get home and show mother the roll of greenbacks you had helped me to earn."

"And we'll help you earn more this very day," said Don, cheerfully. "Don't let that bill trouble you. I have ten dollars of your money in my hands, you know, and there are forty dollars more waiting for you up there in the woods."

David could only look his surprise.

"You know you have an interest in that bear trap on Bruin's Island," continued Don, "Bert and I

have just been up there and found three bears—an old one and two cubs. We shot the old one and will take her as our share of the spoils, and you shall have the cubs. Silas Jones will give you twenty dollars apiece for them. We're going back after them as soon as we get some help. Do you feel like going with us? Perhaps it would liven you up a little."

"I'm afraid it wouldn't," said David, beginning to cry again. "You have been very kind to me, but my bad luck is too much for all of us. I haven't the heart to do anything."

"Well, I don't suppose you have," said Don, in a sympathising tone. "Go home and make your mind as easy as possible, and we will see what can be done for you. There! good-by."

David being thus abruptly dismissed staggered to his feet and walked away, while Don, after lingering long enough to flourish his fists and make other demonstrations indicative of a desire to pound somebody, ran off toward the house, leaving his brother to make the sail-boat ready for her trip up the bayou.

"Why, Don," exclaimed the general, as the boy burst panting and almost breathless into the library,

where his father sat busy with his papers, "what has happened? You seem to be very much excited about something."

"O, father," cried Don, "here's a fearful mess. Dave Evans received a hundred and sixty-four dollars and a half, clear of all expenses, for his quails, and last night his father came home and stole every cent of it."

The general laid down his pen and turned his chair around so that he could face Don. "How did Godfrey find out that David had the money?" he asked.

"Dan must have told him, for he was there looking through a crack between the logs; but how Dan found it out is a mystery. Dave was going to give the money to me as soon as I came home. Godfrey must have acted like a brute. He threw Dave clear across the room, and pushed his mother about in a way that was perfectly shameful."

"It is very unfortunate," said the general, referring as much to the condition of Godfrey and his family as to the loss of David's money.

"And the worst of it is that David has no redress," continued Don. "He is a minor, and that lazy Godfrey can take every cent he earns."

“That would be true under certain circumstances,” replied the general with a smile, “but suppose you and I could show to Judge Packard’s satisfaction that Godfrey is not a proper person to have charge of a family, and that he has not contributed a dollar towards their support for years; what then?”

“I am sure I don’t know,” said Don, after thinking a moment. “Would the judge do anything about it?”

“Very likely he would. He would issue a warrant for his arrest; and as it would be no trouble at all to prove that David is the main stay of the family, and that he needs that money for the support of himself and his mother, the court would compel Godfrey to hand it over, and then it would probably give him his choice between going to work and going to jail.”

“Good!” exclaimed Don. “David will come out all right after all.”

“I think so,” replied the general, smiling at the boy’s enthusiasm, “and this is just the time to attend to the matter. Court is in session now, you know, and I will see the judge at once.”

Don was delighted; and having placed David’s

interests in safe hands, now spoke of his own affairs

“That isn’t all I have to tell you,” said he. “We found a cub in our trap this morning; the dogs treed another, and I shot the old bear.”

The general, who was busy putting away his papers, turned and looked at Don.

“She was the largest bear I ever saw alive, and it took a bullet and two loads of buckshot to settle her;” continued the boy.

“I hope you will not get into any trouble during your hunting expeditions,” said the general, but it was easy enough to see that he took a fatherly pride in Don’s exploit.

“The strange part of the story is, that when Bert and I reached the island we found Bob Owens and Lester Brigham there, and the old bear had treed them both.”

“That is the second time they have been treed to my knowledge.”

“Sir?” said Don, who knew nothing of the attempt that had been made on the negro cabin.

“Go on with your story,” replied the general, “what were Bob and Lester doing on the island?”

Don hesitated a moment, turning his father’s

words over in his mind and trying to fathom their meaning, and then proceeded to give a hasty account of the thrilling incidents that had happened on the island that morning. The general opened his eyes in surprise, and in response to Don's request that he might have help enough to secure the cubs and remove the old bear, said :

“Certainly. Go to the overseer and tell him you want Jake and Cuff. They will give you all the help you need. If it was not for what you have just told me about David's misfortune, I would go with you myself.”

Don thanked his father, and hurried from the room. The two negroes were at work in the field, and the field was half a mile from the house. That was too far to walk, especially for one who was in such a hurry as Don was, so he jumped on his pony, without saddle or bridle, and set off in a gallop. The negroes grinned all over with delight when the overseer told them what Don wanted of them, and, shouldering their axes, started at once for the house, while Don galloped on ahead. Having delivered his pony into the hands of the hostler, he ran into the house, seized a lunch which one of his sisters quickly put up for him, and he and Bert sat in the

boat and ate it, while waiting for Jake and Cuff. Bert breathed easier when he learned that David had rights after all, and that the law was plenty strong enough to give them to him. Their first care, he said, must be to tell David the good news; but when the negroes had rowed them up to the cabin, they found no one there. The premises were **entirely deserted.**

There was a good deal of excitement and sport, and more hard work, crowded into the next hour. The old bear proved to be fully as heavy and unmanageable as Don had expected, and it was only by dint of extra exertion that they succeeded in getting her into the boat. The cubs squalled, bit and scratched, and before they were secured, Don, who was foremost in the battle, had, as he expressed it, "a pretty looking pair of hands," while Bert's coat was minus one sleeve and a portion of the other. But they had lots of fun in spite of the hard usage they received.

It was a heavy load the stanch little sail-boat had to carry down the bayou, and her gunwales were not more than three inches above the water, but she carried it in safety, and, in due time, was moored to the wharf. One of the negroes was sent to the barn

after a span of mules and a wagon, and when he came back the bears were all tumbled into the vehicle, and hauled up to the house. The old bear was left on the grass, near the back porch, so that the general could see her when he came home; and, when the boys' mother and sisters had taken a good look at the cubs, Jake was sent back to his work in the field, and Don and Bert drove toward the landing, taking Cuff with them. They wanted a strong and faithful ally near at hand, in case the cubs succeeded in freeing themselves from the ropes with which they were confined

The boys found Mr. Jones sitting in front of his store, and the usual number of loafers were keeping him company. "Here they are!" said Don, as he stopped the wagon at the edge of the sidewalk.

The grocer seemed surprised, but he did not ask any questions. He got up and looked into the wagon, and then he was more surprised than ever. He appeared to be delighted, too. "Hold on a minute," said he. "Leave them right there until I fix a place for them."

"How much are they worth?" asked Don.

"Twenty dollars apiece, cash down."

"Are you going to keep them, Mr. Jones?" asked Bert.

"O, no! I am buying them for a showman, who lives in Memphis."

Had this incident happened in a city, Don's wagon would quickly have been surrounded by a crowd of curious people; but the planters about Rochdale had seen so many young bears, that they did not look upon them as objects of interest. The hangers-on got up and took just one look at them, asked the boys a few questions regarding the manner in which their capture had been effected, and then set to work to assist Silas in preparing a box for their reception. The work was soon done; the cubs were transferred to their new quarters, and Don, with forty dollars in his pocket, turned the mules about and drove homeward.

Meanwhile how fared it with Lester and Bob, whom we left in the canebrake comparing notes, and in no amiable frame of mind? Lester seemed to be pretty badly used up by his fall, and it was only after several attempts that he succeeded in regaining his feet; and even then he could not walk, and his companion was obliged to carry him to the boat. But his tongue was lively enough, and he heartily

united with Bob in denouncing the boy who had saved his life. They could not make up their minds whom they hated the more—Don Gordon, who had taken the fight out of their hands and killed the bear, or David Evans, who was to receive forty dollars more, to be added to the nice little sum he had received for trapping the quails.

Having placed his helpless companion in a comfortable position in the bow of the canoe, Bob went back after the guns and Lester's hat, which had been left on the battle field, and then he picked up one of the paddles and pushed off into the stream.

"Luck is against us—that is plain enough to be seen," said he. "We fail in everything we undertake, and if I should slip up on that mail business it would not surprise me at all. Don will blow this exploit of his all over the settlement, and that will place us in a most ridiculous position."

"But can't we talk as fast as he can?" asked Lester. "Here are you and me on one side, and Don and Bert on the other. Our word is just as good as theirs. I couldn't shoot at the bear because my gun was foul," added Lester, who had just discovered that the muzzle of his weapon was choked with mud. "But you shot her, and the wound

proved fatal—not immediately, but in a few minutes. After the bear was dead, up came this Don Gordon and fired a bullet and two loads of buckshot into her, and claiming to have killed her, carried off the old bear and both the cubs. How's that?"

"Good enough!" exclaimed Bob, who saw at once what his companion was trying to get at. "To add weight to the story—I have been in a dozen bear fights, and Don was never in one before to-day."

"But I don't know how to account for my injuries," said Lester, taking hold of his left leg with both hands, and moving it into a little easier position.

"I do," said Bob. "Which part of you hurts the most?"

"My left hip."

"All right. There's where the bear hit you with her paw when she first came out of the cane."

"But how did I get my lame shoulder?"

"She knocked you against a tree."

"So she did," exclaimed Lester. "And it was while the bear was knocking me over that you shot her. Now keep all these little things in mind, so that our stories will agree."

"Is that what you are going to tell your father?"

"That's just it."

"Well, don't you think it will help the bond business a little? I saved your life, you know; for, of course, the bear would have killed you if I hadn't stood by you."

"I'll say so, if you want me to, but it will not be necessary. You needn't worry about those bonds, for I assure you they are all right. Father does almost every thing I ask him to do."

Greatly encouraged by these words, Bob bent to his work with redoubled energy, and the little canoe shot swiftly down the bayou. He made a landing in front of Godfrey Evans's cabin, and leaving his companion there, started for home after a horse and wagon; for Lester declared that he could not possibly ride on horseback. Bob returned at the end of an hour, and having placed his friend in a comfortable position, on a pile of straw on the bottom of the wagon, mounted to the seat and drove off. He was obliged to drive very slowly, and another hour passed before he turned into the carriage-way that led up to Mr. Brigham's residence.

Great was the consternation in that house when Lester was carried, limp and helpless, up the steps

that led to the porch; great was the surprise depicted upon every countenance when it became known that the two boys had passed through the most desperate bear-fight that had ever been heard of, and many were the words of praise that Bob received for the courage he had exhibited in saving the life of his friend. Mrs. Brigham, who believed every word of the ridiculous story, assured him that his heroic conduct should not be forgotten, and Bob, greatly pleased with this little stroke of policy, got into his wagon and drove home. When he had unharnessed the horse, he went into the house and found the family just sitting down to a late dinner.

"Why, Bob," said Mr. Owens, as his eyes fell upon the boy's torn and muddy clothing, "you look as though you had been somewhere."

"I should say I had been somewhere," replied Bob. "If I haven't had a time this morning! Whew! it makes me tremble to think of it. I'll tell you all about it in a few minutes."

Bob went to his room to dress for dinner, and, when he came back and had taken his seat at the table, he began and related the particulars of the fright on Bruin's Island, just as he and Lester had agreed. Mr. Owens looked incredulous, and stared

at Bob so fixedly that the boy was obliged to drop his eyes and look down at his plate. "It's a fact," said he, stoutly. "You just ask Lester the next time you see him. He is all battered and bruised, and I have just helped to put him to bed."

Mr. Owens made no reply. He went on eating his dinner, and Bob, after he had taken a few minutes in which to recover his composure (for his father's sharp glances told him that his story was not believed), inquired:

"Have you done anything about that mail business, father?"

"I have done all I could this forenoon, and am going to work again this afternoon. Gordon has already sent in his bid, and the worst of it is, he has all the best men about here to back him up—that is, all those who *consider* themselves the best,"—added Mr. Owens, in a sneering tone. "But it doesn't follow that one man is better than another because he lives in a larger house and has more money. I shall call on a few planters in the settlement, after dinner, and then I will ride over and see Brigham about those bonds."

"You'll get them, sure," said Bob, confidently. "Lester said so."

"I shall put in my bid at twenty-five dollars," continued Mr. Owens.

"That will be a loss of five dollars a month, or sixty dollars a year," said Bob, thoughtfully. "It is a lot of money, father."

"But if, by losing sixty dollars a year, you could make three hundred, don't you think it would be a good investment?"

Bob said he thought it would; but he told himself that he had just as much right to demand thirty dollars a month for carrying the mail as Dave Evans had. Sixty dollars would buy many things that would be useful to him. That ragamuffin was always in his way.

Bob, having finished his dinner, went out and loitered around until he saw his father mount his horse and ride away, and then he walked off down the lane. He wanted to get away, by himself, so that he could think over his future prospects. He wandered aimlessly about, building air castles, until it began to grow dark, and then he turned his face toward home, where he arrived just in time to see Mr. Owens dismount at the gate.

"What luck?" asked Bob, who was now in the greatest suspense, for he knew that his fate

depended upon the first words that fell from his father's lips.

Mr. Owens did not reply at once. With the most provoking deliberation he hitched his horse to the fence, after which he faced about, put his hands into his pockets, and looked at his son. "Bob," said he, in a tone of voice which made the boy's heart sink within him, "you remember the night that you and Lester went 'coon-hunting, don't you?"

Bob started, but tried to look innocent. Fixing his eyes thoughtfully on the ground, as if he were trying hard to recall the night to which his father referred, he said, slowly:

"I can't say that I do. We have been 'coon-hunting a good many times, you know."

"But I have in mind one particular night on which something occurred that you will remember the longest day you live."

Bob looked down at the ground again, and began to tremble. Knowing what was coming, he backed up against the fence, as if he feared that his father's next words would knock him over. And they did come pretty near it.

"Well, Bob," said Mr. Owens, "I will tell you, for your satisfaction, that you have destroyed all

your chances of being mail carrier in this county. Mr. Brigham said he could not assist in placing a would-be thief in so responsible a position."

"A thief!" gasped Bob.

"Yes. If it hadn't been for Don Gordon's hounds you and Lester would have broken into one of the general's negro cabins. There's where you were on the night you said you went 'coon-hunting. Did you know what you were about? If you had succeeded the law would have taken hold of you."

"I didn't do it," exclaimed Bob, as soon as he could speak. "There's not a word of truth in it."

"O, you can't face it down, and there is no use in trying. The story is all over the settlement, and when it came to Mr. Brigham's ears this afternoon, he made Lester confess."

This was the worst blow of all. Lester had confessed! And since he had begun, where had he stopped? Had he told the truth concerning the adventures of the morning? Had he—and here Bob's heart seemed to stop beating—had he told about the burning of Don Gordon's shooting-box? As these thoughts passed through Bob's mind his rage for the moment got the better of him. "The coward!" he exclaimed. "And I saved his life, too."

"Well, the less you say about that, Bob, the better," replied Mr. Owens. "Lester received his bruises by falling out of a tree."

"How do you know?" Bob managed to ask.

"He said so."

Bob couldn't bear to hear another word. There was only one thing more Lester had to confess, and Bob thought he could not survive if his father should tell him of that. As he turned and hurried down the lane Mr. Owens exclaimed:

"There's another thing, Bob. Lester made a clean breast of everything while he was about it."

The boy quickened his pace, but could not get out of hearing of his father's voice.

"Brigham and I are going to see the general in the morning about the burning of that little shanty over on the lake shore," said Mr. Owens. "We don't want any trouble about it if we can help it."

So intense were Bob's feelings of rage and alarm that he could scarcely breathe. Uttering a loud yell, which he could not have repressed to save his life, he broke into a run and went down the lane at the top of his speed. But fast as he went his fears kept pace with him, and somehow he could not help recalling the text from which he had heard the min-

ister preach a few Sundays before : “ Be sure your sin will find you out ! ”

If Bob had never believed this before he believed it now.

CHAPTER VII.

BOB'S PLANS.

BOB hardly knew what to do with himself. He ran down the lane at the top of his speed until he was out of breath, and then seated himself on a log in a fence corner to think over his situation. All his bright dreams had vanished like the mists of the morning. His friend Lester had overthrown all his air-castles by the confession he had made, and worse than that, he had placed Bob in a predicament such as no boy had ever been placed in before.

“I will never speak to him again as long as I live,” said Bob, shaking his fist at some imaginary object. “The three hundred and sixty dollars a year that I had hoped to earn will be sure to go into the pockets of that Dave Evans, for there is no one to run against him now that I am off the track. And while he is riding about the country, holding his head high in the air and sporting his fine clothes and hunting and fishing outfit (Bob thought David

would spend the money he earned just as he himself would have spent it had he been fortunate enough to secure the position of mail carrier), what will I be doing? I might as well be in the swamp with Godfrey, for I shall never dare to look anybody in the face again. And Lester promised faithfully to stand by me, too."

Bob had one lesson yet to learn, and that was, if he wanted a friend who would stand by him in any emergency, he must not look for him among boys like Lester Brigham.

"My thirty dollars a month have gone up in smoke," continued Bob, who was more enraged when he thought of his defeat than he was when he thought of the damaging disclosures Lester had made, "and what hurts me is the knowledge that Dave will get them. I hope somebody will rob him the very first time he rides out with that mail bag. If I get a good chance I'll do it myself."

If Bob had only known it, he was gradually working himself into a very dangerous frame of mind. The feelings to which he had given utterance were like those that had led Clarence Gordon and Dan Evans into so much difficulty. If Bob had been able to look far enough into the future to see the

trouble that they were destined to bring him into, he would have banished them with all possible haste, angry and reckless as he was at that moment. He remained seated on his log for two hours, growing alarmed every time he recalled the incidents connected with the burning of the shooting-box and the attempt to rob the negro cabin, and furious whenever he thought of the cowardice of his trusted friend; and when he had thought the matter over without having made up his mind to anything, he arose and walked toward the house.

"I must go home some time, and I might as well go now as an hour later," thought he. "Of course the family know all about it, and I'd rather be whipped than see my mother, but it can't be helped. I wish to goodness one of those bears up in Michigan had made an end to that cowardly Yankee before he ever came down here to get me into this mess. I don't believe he ever saw Michigan. I know he never saw a wild bear until this morning."

With a dogged resolution to face the consequences of his misdeeds, whatever they might be, Bob settled his hat firmly on his head, clenched his hands, and walked rapidly along the lane, until he reached the house. He slammed the gate behind him, ran

up the steps that led to the porch, and after hanging his hat on a nail in the hall, opened the door that gave entrance into the sitting-room. Its only occupant was his father, who sat by the fire reading a newspaper.

"Ah! Bob, there's something else I wanted to tell you," said the latter, in a tone of voice which would have led a stranger to believe that he and Bob had just been conversing on some agreeable subject. Mr. Owens never held a grudge against his son, as a good many fathers do. When he had said what he had to say in regard to any of Bob's misdeeds, that was the end of the matter.

"I once heard you make a remark which leads me to believe that the news I have to tell will please you," added Mr. Owens.

"I hope it will," answered Bob. "I ought to hear something pleasing after all the hard things I have listened to to-night."

"Well, you have sense enough to know that you alone are to blame. I am sorry enough that you allowed yourself to be led away, but it can't be helped now. Your wish has been gratified. David Evans has lost every cent of the money he received for his quails."

Bob, who sat on the other side of the fire-place, with his eyes fastened on the floor, started up and became all attention when these words fell upon his ear. He looked surprised for a moment, and then settled back in his chair with a sigh indicative of the greatest satisfaction. "Why, how did he lose it?" he asked, as soon as he could speak.

"His father took it away from him," was the reply.

"Good!" cried Bob.

"It seems that both he and Dan were concerned in the matter," continued Mr. Owens. "Godfrey is hiding somewhere in the swamp, you know, and Dan has been acting as a sort of scout between his camp and the village, and keeping him posted in all that was going on."

"I wish I had known it," said Bob. "I would have given Dan more than one hint."

What would Bob have thought had he known that Dan was the one who set Don Gordon's hounds on him, and defeated the attempt he had made to break into the cabin and liberate David's quails? He would have been very likely to give him something besides hints.

"Dan found out enough without help from any-

body," returned Mr. Owens. "How he did it I don't know; but he managed matters so skilfully that Godfrey dropped down on the cabin at the only time he could have secured the money. If he had waited until the next morning the greenbacks would have been safe in the hands of Don Gordon, who, I believe, acts as David's banker, and Godfrey might have whistled for them."

"I am glad of it," exclaimed Bob. "I am glad of it," he repeated, as he pictured to himself the despair that must have taken possession of the Boy Trapper when he saw his hard earnings thus unexpectedly snatched from his grasp. "It serves him just right; for if it hadn't been for him I should have had a nice little breech-loader hanging on the pegs in my room in a few days more. I hope he will be served in the same way every time he gets out of his place, and tries to shove himself up among white folks. I hope, too, that they'll not catch Godfrey."

"You need not lose any sleep worrying over that," said Mr. Owens, with a smile. "Godfrey knows every nook and corner of the swamp, and all the constables in the county couldn't find him. Besides, what could they do with him if they did find him?"

"Couldn't they do anything with him?" asked Bob.

"Of course not. He is David's father, and the law gives him the right to take every penny the boy earns up to the time he is twenty-one years old."

"Good again," cried Bob. "It is the best news I ever heard, and will give me the best night's rest I have had for three weeks. Good-night, father."

Mr. Owens picked up his paper again, and Bob went to his room and tumbled into bed.

"I tell you it makes me feel easier to know that that ragamuffin will never enjoy the money he has cheated me out of," thought Bob, who, in the satisfaction he felt at David's loss entirely forgot the injury Lester Brigham had done him by his confession, "but at the same time I am sorry to hear that that worthless Godfrey has come into possession of it. I ought to have it—the whole of it, now that Lester has gone back on me, and if there was any way that I could think of to outwit Godfrey and get hold of it—By gracious!" exclaimed Bob, in great excitement, "that's a bright idea!"

Bob settled his head into a comfortable position on his pillow and lay for a long time thinking over something his father had said during their recent

conversation. Mr. Owens had remarked that Godfrey knew every nook and corner of the swamps, and that all the constables in the county could not find him. Bob told himself that he knew every inch of the swamps, too, and that if anybody could trace Godfrey to his hiding-place, he was the one. But he did not believe that the fugitive was in the swamp. He thought that Godfrey's camp could not be very far away—in fact, that their plantation must be nearer to it than any other, or else the man would not have come to Mr. Owens's smoke-house to steal bacon. After Bob had reasoned in this way for a while he must have arrived at some conclusions that delighted him, for he suddenly raised himself upright in bed and struck his open palm with his clenched hand.

“Perhaps all the constables in the county can't find him,” said he to himself, “but I believe I can. At any rate I'll start out in search of his camp in the morning just as soon as I have eaten my breakfast, and if I discover it I'll find some way to get hold of that money or my name is not Owens.”

Bob lay down again and rolled over to think about it; and he thought about it for hours. The longer he turned the matter over in his mind, the

more excited he became ; and, although he had told his father that he could enjoy the best night's rest he had had for three weeks, he did not fall asleep until about two hours before he was called to breakfast. The first things he thought of after he opened his eyes were the hundred and sixty dollars Godfrey had in his possession, and the plans he had determined to put into execution in order to get them into his own hands. It never occurred to him then that he was about to act the part of a thief, for he was so wholly engrossed in thinking about the fine hunting and fishing outfit that he intended to purchase with the money, if he got it, that he could not bestow a thought upon anything else. His chances for success seemed so bright that he became excited while he dwelt upon them, but he succeeded in controlling himself so that the members of the family did not notice it ; and when he had eaten a hearty breakfast and put a generous lunch into his game-bag, he shouldered his father's rifle and left the house.

His game-bag was not a very handsome or expensive article. It was made of a piece of thick cloth, cut square and sewed together on three sides, and was slung over his shoulder by a leather strap. This strap, where it crossed his breast, was formed

into a rude sheath in which Bob carried his hunting knife. The bag answered the purpose for which it was intended—that of carrying the squirrels, quails, and other small game that fell to Bob's rifle—but it did not suit the boy. He wanted something better, and felt angry every time he looked at it.

“I'll have one like Don Gordon's before many days (somehow all the boys in the settlement who did not like Don envied him and wanted things just like his), with a net to hold the game and leather pockets to carry my knife, cartridges and matches in,” said Bob to himself, as he put his lunch into the bag. “I'll have a breech-loader, too, just as good as his own: and when I get it I'll take pains to meet him somewhere in order to let him see that there are boys in the settlement who are just as well off as he is, and just as able to throw on style. Look out for yourself now, Godfrey Evans! I am on the trail of those greenbacks!”

Bob made his way in the direction in which Godfrey fled on the night he was discovered in the smoke-house, and after crossing an extensive cornfield, plunged into the woods and turned his face toward a certain locality that he believed to be one of the places in which Godfrey would be most likely to

make his camp. Bob knew that Godfrey had a hiding-place on Bruin's Island, in which he had concealed himself while the Union forces were passing through that part of the state, and he knew, too, as everybody else in the settlement did, that he had gone there as soon as his connection with the affair of the buried treasure became known. It was also noised abroad in the settlement that the fugitive had been driven off the island by Don Gordon's hounds, and everybody wondered where he was now. Bob thought he knew. There were numerous hills and gullies on the main shore in the vicinity of Bruin's Island, and in one of these gullies he expected to find the man of whom he was in search.

The moment Bob entered the woods he threw his rifle into the hollow of his arm and slackened his pace to a very slow and stealthy walk. His experience had taught him that hunters sometimes run upon the game of which they are in search before they know it; and, although he believed Godfrey's camp to be five miles and more away, he was as cautious as though he expected to find it in the very next thicket. The sound of rustling branches and dropping nuts, accompanied by an occasional squeal of alarm, told him that the squirrels were at work

on all sides of him; but Bob paid no attention to them. He was in pursuit of larger and more profitable game. He made his way slowly through the woods, stopping now and then behind a tree or thicket of bushes to listen and look about him, and at one o'clock found himself standing on the bank of the bayou.

The bank, at this point, was in reality a bluff, and rose to the height of a hundred feet or more. On each side of it was a densely wooded ravine, one of which extended back into the forest, and the other, after running parallel with the bayou for a short distance, turned abruptly to the left and was finally lost in the swamp. They were both excellent hiding-places, and while Bob stood leaning on his rifle, wondering which one he ought to explore first, he saw a thin, blue cloud rising from the bushes which covered the bottom of the ravine on his right. Most boys would not have noticed it; but Bob was on the lookout for just such a sign, and he knew at once that it was the smoke of a camp-fire.

"There he is," said he to himself, taking a hurried survey of the ridge in the hope of finding a path that led into the ravine. "It must be Godfrey, for no one else would be likely to make a camp in such

a place. Now, if he is at home I must come upon him before he knows it, for if he hears me he'll run off, and that wouldn't suit me at all."

Failing to find the path of which he was in search, Bob selected a place where the bushes grew the thinnest, and throwing himself on his hands and knees, crept quickly but noiselessly down the ridge, pushing his rifle in front of him as he went. Before starting he fixed the direction of the camp-fire in his mind, so that it was not necessary for him to stop and take his bearings. He kept straight ahead, working his way along with such caution that he scarcely caused a leaf to rustle, and finally raising his head above a huge log behind which he had crept for concealment, he saw the camp-fire close before him. Godfrey was at home, too. He was lying on a bed of boughs beside the fire, his head resting on his hand, the stem of his pipe tightly clenched between his teeth and his eyes fixed upon the glowing coals. The boy looked at him in surprise. Godfrey had never been noted for his neat appearance, at least since Bob became acquainted with him, but the young hunter had never seen him look as he did now. His clothes were all in tatters,

his hair, which was not concealed by a hat, was dishevelled, and his face was very pale and haggard.

"I wouldn't be in his place for all the money there is in Mississippi," said Bob to himself, as he drew back behind the log to make up his mind what he ought to do next. "It will not be long now before the cold winter rains will set in, and then what will he do with himself? He'll freeze to death."

Bob lay quiet behind the log for a minute or two and then suddenly rising from his place of concealment, showed himself to the astonished Godfrey, who let his pipe fall out of his mouth and started up in great alarm. Bob was so close to him that flight was useless. He was discovered and there was no help for it.

"Why, Godfrey, is that you?" exclaimed the boy, as if the meeting were purely accidental. "Did you see a spike buck run this way about half an hour ago?"

Godfrey slowly and almost painfully arose to his feet, bringing his rifle up with him, and the boy heard the lock click as the hammer was drawn back. He looked dangerous, and Bob began to fear that he had done a very foolhardy thing, in following up so

desperate a man as Godfrey was known to be when he was aroused. "Hullo!" he cried. "What's the matter with you?"

"Ye can't shet up my eyes with yer spike buck," answered Godfrey, in savage tones. "Ye'r on my trail."

"On your trail?" repeated Bob, innocently.

"Yes, an' I know it. Ye'r a follerin' me; but it'll take more'n one *man* to tote me to the cala-boose. Ye hear me speakin'?"

"Why, I don't understand you."

"Wal, I reckon ye know thar was a furse in the settlement, an' that they blamed me fur it, don't ye?" demanded Godfrey, impatiently.

"O, is that what you mean?" exclaimed Bob. He leaned his gun against the log, and walking up to the fire warmed his hands over the coals. Godfrey looked sharply at him for a moment and then dropped the butt of his rifle to the ground. "No," continued Bob, "I did not hear of any fuss in the settlement. I knew that you and that city chap, Clarence Gordon, played a good joke on Don, and kept him tied up in your potato cellar all night; but that can't be what you are staying out here in the

woods for? It has all blown over now. Nobody ever speaks of it."

Godfrey looked suspiciously at Bob, and then his face brightened. Perhaps things were not so bad after all, he told himself. His brow became clouded again a moment afterward, however, when he thought of the highway robbery of which he had been guilty. But he might have made his mind easy on this score, for there was no one in the settlement who knew anything about it, not even the general; for his brother had never mentioned the circumstance in his letters.

"Is that all ye heard about me?" asked Godfrey.

"Well, no," answered Bob. "I understand that you went home night before last and took the hundred and sixty dollars Dave made by trapping quails."

"Wal, dog-gone my buttons, wasn't they mine?" shrieked Godfrey, jumping up and knocking his heels together. "Haint he my son an' haint I his pap? Haint I older an' don't I know more'n he does, an' haint it the properest thing that I should have the handlin' of all the money what comes into the family? Whoop! Don't the law give me all

the airnin's of my scamps of boys till they're twenty-one years ole?"

"Hold on, now," exclaimed Bob, who, although he was not a little startled by Godfrey's exhibition of temper, tried to look quite unconcerned. "Don't smash things. Everybody knows that it was your money, and that you had a perfect right to take it."

"That's jest what makes me so pizen savage," yelled Godfrey, throwing down his rifle, burying both hands in his hair, and striding back and forth like an insane man. "It's mine, an' I had oughter have it; but, dog-gone it, I haint got it now."

The last word was uttered with a wild shriek that made the words ring again. Bob looked and listened in great wonder, and stepped back a pace or two.

"Jest look a yer," cried Godfrey, thrusting his hand into his pocket and bringing it out through the hole which Dan had cut with his knife. "I give half the money to that thar mean Dan o' mine, but he got mad jest kase I wanted to take keer on it fur him; so when I was asleep he cut out the box an' tuk hissself off to the swamp!"

Here Godfrey went off into another wild paroxysm of rage, and Bob sat down on the log and looked at him.

CHAPTER VIII.

BOB IN A QUANDARY.

YES, sur, that's jest what that mean Dan o' mine done," shouted Godfrey, swinging his arms about his head. "I didn't find it out until this mornin', an' then I cut a big hickory, and tuk arter him mighty peart, I tell ye; but somehow I couldn't ketch the trail. I'll take arter him agin bright an' 'arly to-morrer, howsomever, an' I'll ketch him if I have to hoof over the hul state of Mississip. I jest come back here to take a leetle rest an' kinder plan my movements, like the generals do afore a battle, ye know."

This was not the real reason why Godfrey came back to his old camp. He believed that Dan was hiding somewhere in the swamp; and as that covered a large section of country, where plantations were few and far between, Godfrey thought it would be a good plan to replenish his haversack before starting in pursuit of his graceless son. The bacon and

meal he had stolen from Mr. Owens's smoke-house (Godfrey wondered why Bob did not say something to him about that affair) had all been eaten or wasted, and when night came Godfrey intended to go out on another foraging expedition. He was well acquainted in the settlement, all the dogs knew him, and it would be much easier and safer for him to break into a smoke-house there, than it would be in a strange neighborhood.

Bob was very much astonished at what he heard. He knew that Godfrey had uttered nothing but the truth, and told himself that he understood the situation perfectly. Godfrey was called the meanest man in the settlement, so far as money was concerned. He had been known to go to the store and beg for credit when he had cash enough in his pocket to pay for the goods he wanted. He would hold fast to a dollar as long as he could, and only let it go when he found that he could not help himself. It was not to be supposed that he would willingly give Dan half the hundred and sixty dollars, no matter how solemn the promises he might have made him. The plea that he wanted to take care of Dan's share for him amused Bob, who knew that it was only an excuse on Godfrey's part for keeping it

all; and the boy thought that Dan showed wisdom in doing as he did. He wondered at it, too. He didn't think Dan was half so smart.

"Well, Godfrey," said Bob, rising from his log and picking up his rifle, "if any one should serve me a trick like that, do you know what I would do? I would hunt him, night and day, until I found him."

"Yer mighty right, I will," yelled Godfrey. "Ye hear me? An' when I ketch him, I'll make a hickory whistle about them ears of his'n till he'll think thar's a harrycane goin' through the woods. Now I'm a shoutin' to ye!"

"Well, good-by, Godfrey," exclaimed Bob, who, seeing that the man began to show symptoms of going into another flurry, thought it best to get out of harm's way. "Success to you."

"I say, Mister Bob," cried Godfrey, suddenly calming himself, "yer a monstrous fine boy, Bob, an' me an' my ole woman has allers been amazin' fond of ye, an' sot a heap of store by ye. Ye won't say nothing to nobody 'bout seein' me out here in the bresh, will ye, Mister Bob?"

"Not a word. You may depend upon me, Godfrey. If they don't find you till I tell them where you are, you'll never be found. Now here's a go,"

thought Bob, as he brought his rifle to a trail, and struggled slowly up the steep bank toward the top of the ridge, "and the question is, who is going to catch Dan first, Godfrey or I? I shouldn't be afraid to say that I shall be the successful one, for Godfrey is going to look in the wrong place. He thinks Dan is in the swamp, but I don't. He has shown himself to be a sly fox, and he wouldn't be foolish enough to go down there and get lost in those dense canebrakes. There are too many bears and wild-cats in them. Dan is hidden somewhere among these hills, and so close to the settlement that he can hear every boat that whistles at the landing."

Bob was greatly encouraged by what he had heard during his interview with Godfrey. He thought it was a very fortunate thing for him that Dan had stolen the money, for it made it easier for him to accomplish the task he had set for himself. He had entertained some serious doubts as to his ability to outwit Godfrey, but he told himself that, if he was not smart enough to get the better of Dan in some way, he ought to go without a breech-loader as long as he lived. Just how he would set about it he had not made up his mind. His first hard work must be, to find Dan. That was the greatest

difficulty to be overcome. The others were small in comparison.

Having, at last, reached the top of the ridge, Bob sat down for a few minutes to recover his breath, and eat his lunch, and then set out through the woods at a rapid walk. There was no need of caution, now, for it was not at all probable that Dan would be found anywhere within sight of the smoke of his father's camp-fire. Bob seemed to know where he was going, for he held a straight course, turning aside for neither gully nor hill, until, at length, he reached a high ridge, bounded on each side by a deep and densely-wooded ravine, like the one in which he had discovered Godfrey. If Dan was to be found anywhere among the hills, this was the place in which Bob thought he ought to look for him. He examined both the ravines as well as he could, as he walked rapidly along, but nothing like the smoke of a camp-fire was to be seen. When he arrived at the end of the ridge he would have been glad to return, and go over that portion of it which he had not yet surveyed; but the declining sun admonished him that it was time for him to turn his face homeward, and this he reluctantly did.

“I was in hopes that I should have that money in

my possession before I went to bed to-night," thought Bob, as he shouldered his rifle, and struck a straight course for his father's plantation. "But I'll have it to-morrow night, unless luck goes against me. I am sure he is in one of these two gullies; and I will be out in the morning about the time he is cooking his breakfast, and then I'll see the smoke of his fire. Hallo! Be-he-he!"

That is as near as we can come to spelling the sound to which Bob gave utterance, just after he finished his soliloquy. It was a perfect imitation of the bleat of a fawn. While he was hurrying along, intent on reaching home before dark, and thinking busily about Dan Evans, he "jumped" a huge buck from the top of a fallen tree, just in front of him. The buck ran as only a frightened deer can, but, before he had made many bounds, he heard Bob's call, and came to a stand-still. He paused but an instant, but that instant was fatal to him. As he turned his stately head, the bullet from Bob's rifle pierced his neck and he fell, and died almost without a struggle. Bob ran quickly to his side, and in a very short space of time, considering the amount of work that was done, the deer had been cleaned and hung upon the branches of a small tree, out of reach

of the wolves, and the young hunter was once more on his way home. He reached the house shortly after dark, and found the family just sitting down to supper.

Bob fell asleep that night while laying his plans for the following day, and being wearied with his long tramp, he slept soundly; but he was up by the time the first gray streaks of dawn were seen in the east, and accompanied by a decrepit old negro, who led a mule as old and infirm as himself, set out for another day in the woods.

"Mister Bob," said the negro, as they made their way across the cornfield, "does yer know dat somebody was a tryin' fur to steal dem chickens dis mornin'?"

"No," replied Bob. "I didn't know it."

"Yes, sar, dar was. Dis mornin' I heared a fursin' out dar an' I says to myself: 'Bijah, dar's an owl gwine fur dem chickens.' So I gets up an' goes to de do' fur to shoo him off, an' I sees somebody in de tree whar de chickens was a roostin'. So I goes up mighty quiet an' still an' he nebber sees nor hears me till I was plumb under de tree; den he draps and I retch fur him. But I aint spry like I was in my young days—no, sar, I aint—an' I nebber

cotch him; but I skeared him mighty bad, an' yo jest oughter see dat feller hump hisself."

"He ran fast, did he?"

"O, yes, sar."

"Did he take any chickens with him?"

"No, sar. I done made him drap dem."

"Do you know who he was?"

"O, yes, sar; dat biggest Ebans boy—Dan Ebans. Yes, sar, dat's who he was. Mister Bob, 'pears to me dat de law oughter cotch some of dem white trash, kase dey's a heap wusser den de niggers 'bout stealin'. Yes, sar, dey is so."

"O, there's no use in saying anything about it, 'Bijah. He didn't get any of the chickens?"

"No, sar, but he done tried mighty hard."

"I would not care if he had got every chicken on the plantation," said Bob, to himself, "for now I know that I am on the right track. Dan is camped closer to our house than he is to any other, or he would not have come to our hen-roost to steal chickens. He is well enough acquainted with the woods to know that the best hiding-place he can find is in one of those two gullies, and right there is where I shall look for him."

Bob found the buck he had killed the night before

just as he had left it, and when it had been placed on the mule's back, old 'Bijah set out on his return to the plantation. As soon as he was out of sight among the trees Bob turned his face toward the ridge he had explored on the previous day, moving along so slowly and stealthily that he had hardly caused a leaf to rustle. When he reached the high ground he became still more cautious in his movements, and every now and then he would stop and listen, and look sharply in every direction.

Had a city youth been standing by Bob's side on the top of the ridge, he would have thought that the young hunter had undertaken a hopeless task. The gullies, which ran on each side, were so densely covered with bushes that an army might have found concealment in them. More than that, they were two or three hundred yards wide at the bottom, and more than five miles long; and how could Bob hope to discover a single boy in that wilderness? By the same tell-tale sign that had revealed Godfrey's presence to him—the smoke of a camp-fire. He discovered it before he had gone half a mile. It ascended in a thick cloud from a clump of bushes on the side of the opposite ridge, and Bob told himself that Dan

had just started his fire, and was getting ready to cook his breakfast.

"He'll not have broiled chicken, that's certain," said he, as he threw himself flat on the ground and began to work his way down the ridge in the direction of Dan's camp. "He ran considerable risk when he tried to rob our hen-roost, and I don't see what made him do it when game is so abundant. Probably he wanted a change."

Bob crept through the bushes with surprising swiftness, and at the end of half an hour had approached near enough to Dan's camp to take a good survey of it. Dan was at home, and he was engaged in a most pleasing occupation, if one might judge by the smiles which now and then overspread his face. He was sitting on a log, which he had rolled up in front of the fire, holding in one hand a small tin box, and in the other a package of greenbacks. He held the bills in all sorts of positions, so that he could see every side of them. He ran his fingers over them caressingly, spread them out on his knee, and then holding them out at arm's length, turned his head on one side, and looked at them most lovingly. Bob, who saw it all from his place of concealment, was equally interested. He had never

seen so large a package of greenbacks before, and his eyes fairly glistened while he looked at them.

"I had no idea that a hundred and sixty dollars would make such a big bundle as that," thought Bob. "It must be all in small bills. That beggar looks nice with so much money in his possession, doesn't he? But he shan't have it much longer, for it is mine. I could have earned it if it hadn't been for Don Gordon, and I'll have it if I have to knock Dan down to get it."

Fortunately Bob was saved the trouble of putting this desperate resolve into execution, for just then a gray squirrel mounted quickly into the branches of a hickory a few rods away and set up a shrill bark. Dan heard him, and Bob judged by his actions that he had not yet had his breakfast. This was the fact. Dan had been so excited by the success that had attended the plans he had laid for securing the whole of David's money, and so anxious to get safely out of his father's reach and find a secure hiding-place, that he could not take time to hunt up anything to eat. He had not had a mouthful for the last twenty-four hours. He did not even know that he was hungry; but he found it out during the previous night, and his raid on Mr. Owens's hen-roost

had been undertaken because he thought he could not possibly go without something to eat until the day broke and the squirrels began to stir about.

When Dan heard the barking of the squirrel he placed the money quickly in the box, put on the cover, and thrusting it under the log on which he was sitting, hastily drew a few leaves over it to conceal it. This done he picked up his rifle which lay on the ground near him, arose from his seat, and with noiseless footsteps stole off through the bushes in the direction from which the barking of the squirrel sounded. He was out of sight in a few seconds, and this was the time for Bob, who crept quickly out of his concealment, and making a wide circuit around the camp, came up behind the log on which Dan had been sitting. There he paused a moment and listened to make sure that Dan was still working his way toward the squirrel, and then reaching over the log he ran his hand through the leaves which the wind had heaped against it, until his fingers came in contact with the box. With eager haste he seized it, and when he felt it fairly in his grasp his heart seemed to stop beating, so elated and excited was he. He held it with a firm grasp, as if he feared that it might somehow get away from him,

and jumping quickly to his feet, turned his back on the camp and made off. For a few minutes he was very cautious in his movements; and then, believing that Dan was too far away to hear any noise he might make, he broke into a run. He went at his best speed, holding a straight course for home, until the report of a rifle echoing through the woods behind him caused him to slacken his pace to a rapid walk.

“Dan hasn’t discovered his loss yet,” said Bob, “for he has only just shot the squirrel.” He held the box at arm’s length as he spoke, and after looking at it affectionately for a few seconds, put it into his game bag. “Dan will be back to his camp in a few minutes, and I would give something to know how he will act when he finds that his money is gone. His money! It is mine by right, and now that I have got it I am going to hold fast to it. I’ll have a new shot-gun now and a jointed fish-pole in spite of Don Gordon and Dave Evans.”

Bob reached home in due time and his appearance there surprised the family, who wanted to know why he had returned at so early an hour, and where his game was. Bob replied that one reason why he had come home was because he was hungry, having eaten no breakfast that morning; and an-

other was because he had seen no game to shoot except squirrels, and he had grown tired of hunting. His mother prepared a breakfast for him, but if he was hungry his actions did not show it. He was hardly able to swallow a mouthful; and as soon as he could do so without running the risk of being questioned, he arose from the table and left the house. In order to do this he was obliged to watch his chance and slip out while there was no one in the room; for the tin box, which he had taken the precaution to transfer from his game bag to his trousers pocket, stuck out so that when he stood erect no one could help noticing it. He succeeded in leaving the house without attracting any one's attention, and dodging his father, who was in front of the shed saddling his horse, he bent his steps down the lane. There was a log lying on the fence corner, about half a mile from the house, on which he had sat and dreamed away many an hour since he had read that advertisement in the *Red and Gun*, and there Bob stopped to feast his eyes on the contents of the box and make up his mind how he was going to spend them.

"The gun will cost me seventy-five dollars," said he, as he seated himself on the log, straightened out his leg and began working the box out of his pocket.

“That includes shells, wiping rod, loading tools, and things of that sort. The primers and ammunition will cost at least five dollars more. A nice lancewood bass rod will cost eight dollars, a reel five dollars, and hooks, lines, sinkers and bobbers—say two dollars more. That makes ninety-five dollars. Then I shall need a nice game-bag like Don Gordon’s, a fish-basket and a hunting-knife, and if they don’t cost more than five dollars they will be cheaper than I think they are. Say they will cost ten; that makes one hundred and five. Now what shall I do with the other fifty-five? Perhaps I had better buy a new saddle and bridle. If Lester had only acted like a white boy I would have bought some decoys, and he and I could have had high old times this winter shooting ducks and geese. But I’ll warrant I’ll find some way to spend the money.”

Bob having by this time succeeded in getting the box out of his pocket, removed the cover, and after looking up and down the lane, and before and behind him, to make sure that there was no one in sight, he took the bills out and counted them. They were all there, and having satisfied himself on this point Bob put them back, replaced the cover and laid the box down on the log by his side.

"Now, where shall I put my money?" thought he. "I must keep it hid somewhere, for of course it would be dangerous to let any one know that I have got it. What would father say to me if he should find it out?"

Bob suddenly paused, and an expression that it would be hard to describe settled on his face. The thought that had just passed through his mind called up another: If it would be dangerous to let his father know that he had a hundred and sixty dollars in his possession, would it not be equally dangerous to let him see the new shot-gun, fish-pole and other fine things he intended to purchase with the money? If Mr. Owens would be curious to know how Bob had acquired so great and sudden wealth, would he not be equally anxious to know where the gun and fishing-rod came from?

"I declare that never occurred to me before," said Bob, resting his head on his hands and looking thoughtfully at the ground. "I am no better off now than I was when I hadn't a cent in my pocket. I can't enjoy the money now that I have got it. What in the world am I going to do?"

If there ever was a boy who was in a quandary it was Bob Owens.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RUNAWAY.

I DECLARE I never thought of that before," repeated Bob, after he had spent a quarter of an hour in thinking the matter over. As was generally the case when he found himself in trouble, he fell to abusing his luck, which had not served him a better turn. "I can't enjoy this money, now that I have got it," said he. "My breech-loader and fishing-rod are just as far out of my reach as they were a week ago. If I got them, father would ask a thousand and one questions: 'Bob, how came you by that new gun?' 'I bought it.' 'Where did you get the money?' He would be sure to ask me that, and what could I say?"

If Bob, while he was tossing restlessly about on his bed, laying his plans for securing possession of the hundred and sixty dollars, had only taken time for a little serious consideration, he would have discovered that he could not help getting himself into

just such a dilemma as this; but the truth of the matter was, he was so eager to get his hands upon the money that he could think of nothing else. He had succeeded in his efforts, but the money was of no more use to him than it would have been to Dan Evans. True, there was one thing he might do with it, and that was, restore it to its lawful owner. This thought did occur to Bob, but he dismissed it at once.

"I'll never do that in the world," said he, almost fiercely. "If it hadn't been for Dave and his friends I might have had money of my own by this time, and I would have got it, too, in such a way that I should not be afraid to let everybody know that I had it. But Dave cheated me out of the chance, and, sooner than give this money up to him, I'll tie a stone to it and sink it in the middle of the lake. Now is there any way that I can get the benefit of it? That's the question."

And it was one that Bob could not answer for a long time, for he was fairly at his wit's end. If he had acted out his feelings, he would have jumped up and whooped, and yelled, and pulled his hair, just as Godfrey did when he told how Dan had cut his pocket open and stolen the tin box. He felt just

like it; but, knowing that he could not mend matters in that way, he controlled himself as well as he was able, and sat on his log, and thought about it. He went without his dinner, and stayed there until it began to grow dark. By that time he had almost **made up his mind to something.**

"If I can't enjoy my money here, I can enjoy it somewhere else," said Bob to himself, as he arose and walked slowly toward the house, after having concealed the box under the log on which he had been sitting.

"Rochdale isn't the only place in the world. I have always wanted to go out on the plains, and I don't know that I shall ever have a better chance than I have now. I'll take time to think about it, **at any rate.**"

This soliloquy will serve to indicate the train of thought that Bob had been following out all the afternoon. Like many foolish boys, he had often imagined that he would be much happier than he was if he were only free from the restraints of home. He longed to be his own master. He had made more than one attempt to induce his father to permit him to go out into the world to seek his fortune, but Mr. Owens had always refused; and Bob, in one of his

angry moods, had told himself that he would go some day, no matter whether his father was willing or not. He had read wonderful stories of life on the plains; of boy-hunters, and trappers, and Indian-fighters, who had made themselves famous by their deeds of valor, and Bob, believing every word of it, longed to be with them, and join in their exciting adventures. For a year it had been a cherished hope of his that he might some day see that wild country, and the brave young bordermen who were supposed to live there; and when he fell to dreaming about it, as he often did, he was so completely carried away by his imagination, that he fancied himself already there and taking part in the thrilling scenes so graphically described in his favorite yellow-covered books. When he came to himself again, his home would seem more distasteful than ever, and the life he led there would become almost unbearable. And yet it is hard to tell why Bob was so dissatisfied with his lot in life. He had almost everything that any reasonable boy could ask for; his father and mother could not have been kinder, and Bob was obliged to attend school only six months every year, and was permitted to do nearly as he pleased during the rest of the time. Perhaps, if he not been allowed so

many idle hours it would have been better for him, for then he would have had less opportunity to indulge in day-dreaming.

Bob, as we have said, was full of glorious ideas, and this was one of his pet ones. He never allowed himself to dwell upon it without becoming highly excited. He was excited now—as much so as he was when he first felt David Evans's money in his grasp. He had suddenly conceived a violent passion for the wild, free life of a hunter, and a corresponding distate for the quiet comforts and pleasures of his home. What was there about home, he asked himself, that should make him desirous of remaining there? There was no one with whom he could associate, now that he and Lester were at swords' points, and the only way in which he could pass the time was to loiter about the house with nothing in the world to do. If he went down to the landing he would be certain to meet some one there who knew all about that bear fight and the burning of the shooting-box. More than that, he would probably see Don and Bert Gordon, who, dressed in their natty riding-suits and mounted on their stylish ponies, would canter by, paying no more attention to him than if he were a crooked stick lying by the

roadside. Bob's own mount was not a very elegant affair, but it was as good as the most of the boys in the neighborhood owned. He rode a large, raw-boned horse, which, although a fine traveller, was by no means a handsome animal, and his saddle and bridle had been patched so often that there was very little of the original material left in them.

"Even if everything was all right, I should be ashamed to go down to the landing any more," said Bob to himself. "I look like a beggar beside Don and Bert Gordon. If I go hunting I must use an old muzzle-loading gun and a game-bag that Godfrey Evans would turn up his nose at, and it would be just my luck to meet those Gordon fellows with their breech-loaders and hunting-suits, looking as though they had just come out of a band box. They are almost always sure to turn up just when I don't want to see them. They act as if they tried to meet me when they are fixed up in their best, to let me see how rich they are and how poor I am. They make it a point, too, to pass me without saying a word to me."

This was very far from being the truth. Bob's lively imagination, which led him to believe that he would be happier anywhere else in the world than

he was at home, had cheated him into believing that Don and Bert purposely slighted him. But they meant to do nothing of the kind. They always bowed politely and spoke to him every time they met him, and would have been glad to live on friendly terms with him, if Bob had only been willing to let them. But Bob had long had an idea that not only they, but everybody else in the settlement, abused him, and when he fell to thinking about it, he always became angry. He was **angry now and desperate, too.**

“I’ll not stay here any longer, to be put upon and insulted by those who think they are better than I am; because they have more nice things to make them happy,” thought Bob, as he slammed the gate violently behind him. **“I’ll end all my troubles at once, this very night.”**

Bob had made up his mind to run away from home; and having determined upon his course, he never faltered nor paused for a moment to consider what might be the consequences of the act. He ate his supper in sullen silence (he was so irregular in his habits that no one thought it worth while to ask him where he had been during the day), and having satisfied his appetite, put on his hat, and went back

to the log in the fence-corner where he had dreamed away the afternoon. He found the box where he left it, and after crowding it into his pocket, he returned to the house. He stopped at the shed on the opposite side of the road, and when he had made sure that there was no one to observe his movements, he took his saddle and bridle down from the peg on which they hung, and hid them in the tall weeds that grew in the lane, taking care to mark the spot so that he could readily find it again. This done, he stole cautiously along a cross-fence that led to the barn-yard, and there he found his horse running loose in company with others belonging to his father. The animal followed him into the little log building in which he was always fed, and Bob supplied him with a good supper of corn.

“You’ve got a long journey to make, Jack, before you see the sun rise again,” said he, “and you’d better eat while you have the chance. It will be the last time you will ever carry me. I hope the next horse I own will be rather better looking than you are. I hope, too, that you will carry me to Linwood in time to catch the first boat that goes up the river, for I don’t want to stay in Mississippi an hour longer than I can help!”

Bob closed and fastened the door to keep his horse in and prevent the others from disturbing him at his meal, and went into the house. Without saying a word to any member of the family he made his way into his own room, and set about making other preparations for his flight. His first care was to count the money; and having made sure that none of it had been spirited away, he took out sixty dollars, which he thought would be enough to bear his expenses, and put them into his pocket-book, after carefully wrapping them up in several pieces of newspaper. After that he produced from one of the bureau drawers an old buckskin money-belt that had somehow come into his possession. In one of the pockets he found a piece of oiled silk, and in this he wrappel the rest of the money.

"I've heard that that is the way travellers do when they cross the ocean," said Bob, to himself. "Steamboats sometimes burn or sink, and if one has to take to the water, he wants his money well protected. There are such things as pickpockets, too, and I don't intend that they shall get much out of me."

As Bob said this he buckled the belt around his waist, under his clothing, and went into his

closet after a valise. He brought it out and looked at it with undisguised contempt. It was in good order, but it was old-fashioned, and looked very unlike the neat travelling-bag Don Gordon carried when he went to visit his friends in Memphis. It was the only article of the kind that Bob owned, however, and after telling himself that he would throw it away as soon as he had an opportunity to buy another, he went into his closet again to bring out the clothing he intended to take with him. "Here's something else I shall throw away," said Bob, as he folded up his Sunday coat and pushed it into the valise. "I'll throw away all these clothes when I reach the plains, for then I am going to dress in buckskin, the way the rest of the hunters do. But the plains are a long way off yet; it will take some time to reach them, and some time longer to capture and cure the skins I shall need to make me a complete suit; so I'll take two suits with me, in order to have a change in case of emergency."

Bob selected the best he had, and when he had crowded into the valise all that it would hold, he closed and locked it, putting the key into his pocket. The valise he hid under the bed, so that

it would not be seen by any one who might chance to come into his room. By this time it was nine o'clock, and Bob thought he had better go to bed. He did not go out into the sitting-room again, for the family were all there and he did not want to see them. He wanted to be alone, so that he could think about the glorious life upon which he was so soon to enter. He did not care if he never saw any of his relatives again. That was what he thought then, but before many days had passed over his head he would have given the whole world, had it been his to give, if he could have exchanged just a word with one of them.

Bob settled himself snugly in his comfortable bed, but he did not go to sleep. He was afraid that if he did he might sleep too long, and he had so much to think about that it was no trouble for him to keep awake. He heard the clock in an adjoining room strike every hour until midnight, and then he arose and prepared for action. It was the work of but a few minutes for him to put on his clothes and lower himself and his valise out of the window to the ground, and he did it without disturbing any of the family. In half an hour more he had saddled his horse, which he led

out into the lane through a gap in the fence he made for the purpose (he was afraid to lead the horse through the gate, for it was close to the house, and the sound of the animal's hoofs might have aroused somebody), and had put nearly a mile between himself and his home. He left it and the settlement without a single feeling of regret, but still he could not help taking note of the familiar objects on which his eyes rested as he galloped along, and which he never expected to see again. Here was the tall pecan tree which he and Don Gordon and Joe Packard, in the days when they were better friends than they were now, had visited regularly every autumn to gather the nuts that so plentifully covered the ground, and from whose topmost branches Bob had brought down the only fox squirrel he had ever seen. There were the ruins of the bee-tree that he and the same boys had cut down, and from which they had secured a tubful of the finest honey. Off to the right was the little maple grove where he and the Gordon and Packard boys had once camped for more than a week and played at making maple sugar. Farther on was the landing; and there was the post-office with the old, weather-beaten boxes

on which he had so often sat on mail days and awaited the arrival of the carrier, ranged in a row in front of it. Other boys would sit there in the days to come, as he had done in the days gone by, and Dave Evans would come dashing down the main street at the top of his speed, just as the old carrier had done, and throw off the mail-bag with a shout, and Silas Jones would pick it up and hurry into the store with it, and not one of them would ever give a thought to himself or ask where Bob Owens was now.

“No, sir,” said Bob, bitterly, “there’s no one here who cares whether I live or die. If I had been rich I would have had more friends than I wanted.”

The main street was deserted, and the landing looked gloomy enough when seen by the light of the moon, which just now began to emerge from behind the thick clouds that had hitherto obscured it. Bob had time to take only one glance at it as he flew along, and in a moment more it was hidden from his sight by the little grove in which were held the shooting-matches that came off nearly every week in Rochdale at this season of the year. Bob could not forget the many happy hours he

had spent in that same grove, and he turned more than once in his saddle to look at it. It was the last familiar object he would see along the road, and in leaving it behind he seemed to be severing the last link that bound him to his home. He kept it in sight as long as he could, but a bend in the road presently hid it from his view. Then Bob faced about in his saddle, dismissed all thoughts of the pleasures and comforts he was leaving behind, and speedily became absorbed in dreaming of the new scenes and new adventures that awaited him in the wild country toward which he was hastening.

Bob was bound, in the first place, for Linwood, a little landing about the size of Rochdale, situated twenty-five miles further up the river. He had never been there—in fact, he had never been so far away from home in his life—and all he knew about the place was, that the road which ran along the river bank was the shortest route that led to it, and that steamboats stopped there whenever a signal was displayed upon the bank to indicate that there were passengers or freight for them. Bob intended to remain at Linwood until he could board some steamer bound up the river. Where he would

go after that, and what he would do, he didn't know. He had not yet taken time to think of it.

Bob kept his horse in a steady gallop for an hour or more, and then, believing that he had placed a safe distance between himself and his home, he allowed the animal to slacken his pace to a walk. His progress was very slow after that. Besides, as soon as the moon went down it became pitch dark, and Bob, on one or two occasions, got bewildered by turning into a log-road, and never discovered his mistake until he found himself in the thick woods. He went a long distance out of his way, and was delayed more than three hours. It was nine o'clock when he came within sight of Linwood.

It was about this time that Bob met the first person he had seen during his journey. It was a horseman, and Bob passed him a mile below the landing. The man looked sharply at Bob's nag, which walked with his head down as if he were wearied with his night's journey, then stared hard at the boy, and drew in his reins as if he were about to stop and speak to him. Bob, however, did not want any conversation with him, so he put his horse into a gallop, and went on his way; but the keen glances which the stranger had bestowed upon

himself and his steed excited his curiosity, and, when he had gone a few rods, he turned in his saddle and looked back. To his surprise he saw that the man had stopped his horse in the middle of the road, and was also looking back. He did not turn away his head and move on, as people generally do when they are caught in the act of observing another's movements, but kept his eyes fastened upon the boy, as if he had resolved to see where he was going and what he intended to do. Bob became uneasy at once.

"Who is that?" thought he, and, as he asked himself the question, he hurriedly recalled the names of all the planters with whom he was acquainted who bore any resemblance to the man he had just passed. "I am sure I don't know who he is, but he must know who I am. If he does not, why did he look at me so sharply, and pull up his horse as if he was going to say something to me? He's there yet," added Bob, once more turning about in his saddle, and looking behind him.

Yet, the man was there yet, and, more than that, he stayed there as long as Bob was in sight of him. The runaway, who grew more and more uneasy every minute, faced about, now and then, to look at

him, and when he turned down the road that led to the little cluster of houses on the river bank, the man turned his own horse, and rode slowly after him.

When Bob came around the bend in the road, he saw all there was of the little settlement of Linwood. He noticed that, in some respects, it was like Rochdale. It could boast of but one street, and that led from somewhere back in the country, straight through the town (if such it could be called) to a long shed on the bank, which Bob was glad to see was filled with bags of shelled corn. He was glad to see it, for he knew that the corn was awaiting shipment, and that the first boat that went up the river would be signalled to stop and take it aboard.

The settlement consisted of the store, in which the post-office was located, a shoemaker's and blacksmith's shop, and one or two private residences, all of which were built on one side of the street. The store was the most imposing building, and, like the one in Rochdale, was the headquarters of all the idlers in the country for miles around. The proprietor had good-naturedly provided for their comfort and accommodation, by placing a row of empty dry-goods boxes in front of his door for them to sit on,

and, when Bob came in sight, every box was occupied.

Hearing the sound of his horse's feet, one of the idlers looked up, said something in a low tone to his companions, and, an instant afterward, a dozen pairs of eyes were fastened upon Bob, as if they meant to look him through.

CHAPTER X.

BOB'S FIRST ADVENTURE.

I WONDER if they never saw a white boy and a spotted horse before," thought Bob, who could not bear to have any one stare at him. "I hope they will know me the next time they see me!"

He rode to a rack on the opposite side of the street where the horses belonging to the idlers were hitched, and after dismounting and tying his own animal, he took the valise down from the horn of his saddle, where it had hung during the journey, and crossed over to the sidewalk. He bowed and wished the idlers good-morning, as he passed through their ranks, but they only stared at him the harder; and Bob, wondering at their rudeness, kept on and went into the store. A boy about his own age, who was standing in the door, and whom Bob took to be the clerk, for he had a pen behind his ear, and a pair of scissors sticking out of his vest pocket, made room for him to pass, and one of the men on the sidewalk arose from his

box and followed him in. This was the proprietor, as Bob afterward learned.

"Mornin', stranger," said he. "What kin I do fur ye?"

"Good-morning, sir," answered Bob. "Is there any place about here where I can have my horse fed, and get a good breakfast for myself?"

"Been a travellin' a good piece, I reckon, aint ye?" said the man. "Yer creetur looks kinder leg-weary."

"Yes, he and I are both tired. We have come from Rochdale since midnight."

"Came right peart, I reckon, didn't ye?"

"I didn't waste any time, for I want to catch the first boat that goes up the river," replied Bob. "Do you expect one along soon? I see there is a good deal of freight on the bank."

"Wal, I dunno how soon she'll come, but we'll stop her when she does come."

Hearing the sound of footsteps behind him, Bob, who had thus far stood with his back to the door, turned round, and saw that about half the idlers had followed him into the store, and ranged themselves in front of the counter as if they wanted to hear what passed between Bob and the proprietor, while

the other half had crossed to the opposite side of the road and were gathered about his horse, which they appeared to be examining with a great deal of interest. While Bob was looking at them, one of the men pointed to a spot on the horse's flank and struck his open hand with his fist, as if he were emphasizing something he was saying.

"We sometimes do fur hungry folks what come here to ketch boats," said the grocer. "We done had our grab long ago, but I reckon mebbe Betsy can fix ye up suthin'. I'll go an' see."

As the man said this he took Bob's valise from his hand, and disappeared with it through a door in the rear of the store. He was gone about five minutes, and when he came out he announced that Betsy would have some breakfast ready very shortly, and while she was preparing it, he and Bob would put the horse in the stable and feed him. Bob followed him across the street, and while he was unhitching the animal the grocer stood by and gave him a good looking over. "Whar did ye get this crectur, stranger?" he asked at length.

"My father raised him," was the reply. "He has never had any owner but me."

"An' what might yer name be?"

“Owens.”

“An’ whar might ye hang out when yer to hum?”

“Two miles east of Rochdale.”

“Why couldn’t ye take a boat thar as well as here?” asked the man, looking steadily into Bob’s face.

“Because I had some business to transact a few miles below here, and I could save time by coming to Linwood,” answered the boy, without the least hesitation. “I should have lost a day or two if I had gone back to Rochdale.”

“Yer goin’ up the river, ye say : how fur?”

“St. Louis.”

“How long ye goin’ to be gone?”

“A week or two, at least.”

“Want me to keep yer horse fur ye till ye come back, I reckon, don’t ye?”

“O, no. As soon as he has finished his breakfast I’ll put the saddle on him, tie the bridle fast to it so thar it can’t fall off, and turn him loose. He’ll find his way home all right.”

While this conversation was going on Bob had followed the man through a pair of bars, that gave entrance into a yard in the rear of the store, and into a shed where there was a long trough, with a couple of

rope halters made fast to it. Bob put one of these halters on his horse, after relieving him of the saddle and bridle, saw him supplied with a good breakfast of corn, and then followed the man back to the house and into the kitchen, where a woman, whom Bob took to be the Betsy of whom his host had spoken, was busy laying the table, and superintending the cooking of some ham and eggs. In compliance with a signal, conveyed by the wave of the man's hand, Bob took possession of the nearest chair, while the man himself went out into the store, closing the door behind him. The latch, however, did not hold, and the door swung open two or three inches. Bob scarcely noticed this at the time it occurred, but his attention was called to it in a very few minutes.

The woman who was preparing breakfast did not prove to be very sociable, for she never spoke to her guest (although the boy more than once caught her in the act of staring very hard at him), until she had placed the ham and eggs on the table, and then she invited him rather curtly to "set up." After that, as if she considered that she had done her whole duty, she went into another room and shut the door behind her, leaving Bob to wait on himself.

"These are the queerest people I ever saw," thought the boy, as he drew his chair to the table. "They act as if they don't want me here; and if that is the case, why don't they say so? This isn't the only house in the settlement at which I can obtain a breakfast. Perhaps they are Yankees, and afraid that they won't get pay for what I eat."

Bob was too hungry to follow out this train of thought any farther. He devoted himself entirely to the viands before him, and had just poured out a second cup of coffee and helped himself to a second egg, when his attention was attracted by the sound of voices in the store. He distinctly heard his own name pronounced, and after listening for a few moments he caught some words that made his cheek blanch. The men in the store must have been excited about something, for they talked in pretty loud tones, and every syllable they uttered came plainly to Bob's ears through the open door.

"Wal, Aleck, what does he have to say fur himself?" asked a voice.

"He says his name is Owens, an' that he lives two mile from Rochdale," Bob heard his host answer.

“So’s my grandmother’s name Owens,” said the one who had first spoken. “I tell you, Aleck, he’s the fellow we have been a lookin’ fur, an’ you, bein’ a justice, had oughter make out a warrant at once.”

“Pears like he’s mighty bold to bring the hoss back here where he b’longs,” said another. “He’s a powerful peart, honest-lookin’ boy, too.”

“Mebbe it aint the hoss we think it is,” said the grocer. “He says his pap raised him, and seems to me he don’t look like Tom’s lost creetur, nuther.”

“Wal, we’ll know in a few minutes, fur Tom will be here directly. Sam’s jest gone arter him. What brung this boy up here, any how?”

“He’s goin’ to St. Louis. He tells a mighty straight story, but thar’s one thing about it that don’t look jest right to me. Arter the hoss has done got through eatin’, he’s goin’ to put the saddle onto him an’ turn him loose to find his own way back to his hum.”

“Aha!” exclaimed one of the idlers, whose voice Bob had not heard before. “That shows that the creetur don’t b’long to him. If he did, he’d take better care on him nor that. Somebody would be sartin to pick the hoss up for a stray afore he had gone a mile. Here comes Tom, now.”

Bob heard a shuffling of feet, as if the idlers were moving in a body toward the door, then some subdued words of greeting, followed by more stamping of feet, which gradually died away as the men moved off together. Presently, Bob heard the sound of voices in the back yard, and rising from his chair he stepped to a window and looked out. He saw a dozen men there, and they were walking toward the stable. When they reached it the grocer went in and brought out Bob's horse, and the others gathered about him and examined him closely. When their investigations were concluded the animal was led back into the stable again and the men came toward the house.

"Why, I really believe they take me for a horse-thief," thought Bob, and the idea amused him. "Thank goodness, I am not as bad as that. I expect to steal horses from the Indians some day—Wild Bill and Texas Jack and all those fellows do it, and there's no harm in it; but I'll never steal from a white man. I only hope I shall be lucky enough to find the Comanche chief who rides that white pacer. He's the horse I've got my eye on, and he's worth having, for he is so swift that he can

beat anything on the prairie out of sight in a five-mile race."

Bob, who was not at all disturbed by the knowledge that the grocer and his friends suspected him of being anything but an honest boy, walked back to his seat at the table and helped himself to another egg. A few seconds later the men entered the store and Bob heard the clerk inquire:

"Well, Tom, is it your horse?"

"No; but he looks enough like him to be his brother," was the reply.

"There!" said Bob, to himself. "I hope they are satisfied now."

"Don't make no difference whether it's Tom's hoss or not," said a voice, which Bob afterward found belonged to the constable. "That thar boy is no good; if he was, he would not want to turn that creetur loose to find his way back to his hum, twenty-five miles away. Bein' a suspicioned person we have a right to know all about him. You say, Aleck, that he come up here to see somebody on business. Who was it, an' what was his business?"

"I dunno," answered the grocer. "I didn't think to ask him about that."

"Wal, we'd best find out about it. Thar's some

hoss-thief or another some whar about here, an' if this chap is the feller, we'd oughter hold fast to him now that we have got him. It won't be no trouble at all to take him back to Rochdale an' see if anybody thar knows him, an' if he's all right he won't mind goin' there with me."

These were the words that made Bob's cheek blanch. His heart began to beat rapidly, and his hand trembled, as he put down his cup of coffee. He saw, now, that it was not so very amusing, after all, to be suspected of being a horse-thief. He certainly would mind going back to Rochdale. It was the very place that he wanted to keep away from.

"What in the world would I say to my father, if I allowed myself to be taken back there?" thought Bob, who was now seriously alarmed. "What *could* I say to him? What reason could I give for leaving home during the night, and riding off through the country for twenty-five miles? I tell you, if I was only back there, I'd stay; but the trouble is, I can't go back without letting everybody know that I ran away. Of course, all the folks in the settlement will find it out some day, but I don't want to see them after they do find it out."

Once more Bob was in a quandary, but he was not

long in discovering, as he thought, a way to get out of it. While he was looking all around the room, as if seeking some way of escape, his eye fell upon his valise, which the grocer had placed upon a chair in the corner. The sight of it suggested something to him. Hastily snatching up his cap, he crossed the floor with noiseless steps, seized the valise, and hurried to the door which led into the back-yard. He opened it very carefully, stepped quickly across the threshold, and found himself confronted by a tall fellow, dressed in butternut clothes, who stood leaning against the fence, whittling the top rail with his knife, and whistling, softly, to himself. Something told Bob that the man had been stationed there to watch him, and, at first, he did not know whether to go back into the house or keep on toward the stable, where he had left his horse; but, after a moment's reflection, he decided that the boldest course was the best, and so he closed the door and walked off. He tried to look unconcerned, but his face was pale, and he trembled in every limb. The sequel proved that he had cause for uneasiness, for, before he had made a dozen steps, the man of the fence called out:

“Wal, I say! Hold up, thar!”

Bob's first impulse was, to take to his heels, but

he thought better of it, and obeyed the man's command to "hold up!" "What do you want?" he asked.

"Wal, nothing much, now, only we don't want you to go away without saying good-by; that's all."

"Why don't you want me to go away?" asked Bob.

"'Kase why, for a reason. We want to know something about that hoss of your'n first."

"The proprietor of the store already knows all I have to tell about both myself and my horse," returned Bob.

"Wal, it don't just suit us," said the man, shutting up his knife and putting it into his pocket. "The constable has been waiting for you to get done your breakfast, and then he's going to ride down to Rochdale with you. If you live thar you must have friends who can vouch for you."

"But I don't want to go back to Rochdale," exclaimed Bob. "It will delay me, and I can't afford to waste any time."

"It needn't delay you longer than to-morrow. Let's go round where the boys are."

The "boys" were the idlers, whom Bob and his captor found sitting on the drygoods boxes in front of the store. One of them, a fat, red-faced, jolly-

looking man, arose from his seat as the boy came up, and, placing one hand on his shoulder, remarked, that he should be obliged to hold him, in the name of the law, until Bob could satisfy him that he was all right, and that he had come honestly by the horse he had brought into the settlement that morning. Bob hardly heard a word the officer said to him, for he was too nearly overcome with bewilderment and alarm to hear anything. Besides, he was thinking too busily; trying to conjure up some plan for bringing himself safely out of this, the worst difficulty he had ever been in. He had longed for a life of excitement and adventure, but he had not looked for it to begin before he had been twelve hours away from home. It looked, now, as though his first adventure was destined to be his last. It certainly would be, if he allowed the constable to take him back to Rochdale.

Having performed his duty, and placed Bob under arrest, the officer for the next half hour paid no attention to his prisoner. He returned to his seat on the drygoods box, and talked with his friends about the crops and the weather, leaving Bob to commune undisturbed with his own gloomy thoughts, and to stand or sit, as he pleased. The idlers im-

proved the opportunity thus presented to stare hard at the supposed horse-thief, and Bob was greatly relieved when the constable, having at last talked himself dry of words, arose from his box with the remark, that he reckoned they had better go home. Bob gladly obeyed the order to pick up his valise and follow him; and as they walked toward the officer's house, which was located on the main road, about half a mile from the landing, he began to make some inquiries regarding the treatment he might expect: for this was a matter that troubled him not a little. To his great joy and surprise, he found that, if he was willing to behave himself, he would be placed under very little restraint. The constable said he could not go to Rochdale with him that day, as he had some important business of his own to attend to, but he would start with him early in the morning, and, if Bob could prove to his satisfaction that he was an honest traveller, as he represented himself to be, he would be very glad of it. Meanwhile, as there was no "cooler" in the settlement to put him into for safe-keeping, Bob must remain under the eye of the constable all the time. If he would promise to make no attempt at escape, he would be allowed the free use of his hands and

feet; but, if he would not make that promise, he (the officer) would be obliged to put a pair of handcuffs on him. Bob's blood ran cold at the mere mention of such a thing. He hastened to give the required promise, adding emphasis to it by declaring that the sooner he was allowed an opportunity to show that the good people of Linwood were badly mistaken in him, the better he would like it. The constable seemed entirely satisfied, and from that moment scarcely looked at his prisoner. Probably he thought that, because Bob was a boy, he had nothing to fear from him.

Bob accompanied the officer wherever he went during the day, but he did so with apparent willingness and without waiting to be told. He spent the most of the time in the woods, where the constable had some negroes employed in getting out timber for him, and on two occasions the latter went over a ridge where his ox-teams were at work, leaving Bob to himself for more than an hour each time. "I wonder what he will do with me when night comes," Bob asked himself over and over again. "He must watch me closer than he does now or I may be missing before daylight. I'll not go back to Rochdale if I can help it. I'll risk anything first."

When Bob went to the officer's house that night he was treated more like a guest than a prisoner. The constable's wife said nothing to indicate that she knew he was under arrest, and when supper was over Bob was surprised to hear the man remark that he believed he would go down to the store for an hour or two, and see what was going on there. He went, and did not return until nearly ten o'clock. Then he began to make some preparations for the safe-keeping of his captive during the night, but they did not amount to much, and Bob's heart beat high with hope. The officer simply drew a settee into the front room, and placed it opposite the sofa, which stood on the other side of the fireplace. "I am going to sleep here," said he, "and when you get tired you can lie down there."

Suiting the action to the word the officer stretched himself upon the settee, and in less than ten minutes was soundly asleep. Bob sat in an easy-chair by the fire and looked at him; and as he looked he fell to thinking of the wonderful exploits of some of his favorite heroes, and comparing his present situation with those in which they had so often been placed. They always succeeded in bringing themselves safely out of the most desperate scrapes.

Even when they were tied to the stake by their savage foes, they found means to outwit them and effect their escape. Wild Bill and Texas Jack would laugh to find themselves in a predicament like this Bob was in, and if he was ever going to be as famous as those two men were, it was high time he was making a beginning. While Bob's thoughts ran along in this channel he narrowly watched the slumbering officer, and finally calling all his courage to his aid, he picked up his hat and valise, opened the door, and stepped out on the porch. There he paused for a moment to make sure that the way was clear, and then, after taking a parting glance at the constable, he closed the door and ran toward the landing. It was after eleven o'clock, and the streets were entirely deserted.

A few minutes' rapid running brought Bob to the store. Here he became very cautious in his movements, for he knew that the grocer and his family occupied the rear portion of the building. He climbed over the bars through which he had led his horse in the morning, and made his way toward the shed at the end of the lot. He found his horse there, and the animal appeared to be glad to see him, for he welcomed him with a low whinny of recognition.

“I never expected to mount you again, old fellow; but you must carry me a little farther on my way up the river, and then you must go home. I wish I could go with you,” said Bob, who was more than satisfied with his short experience with the ways of the world. “If I could only go back without letting folks know that I ran away, I’d start this minute.”

While Bob was talking thus to himself he was busy putting the saddle and bridle on his horse; and when that had been done, he opened his valise and took from it a suit of clothes, which he proceeded to put on with all possible haste. He knew that his flight would be taken as evidence of guilt, and that every effort would be made to recapture him; so he thought it best to disguise himself as well as he could by putting on another hat and exchanging his gray suit for a black one.

“I am going to get as many miles away from Linwood as I can between this and daylight,” said Bob to himself, “and then, as I can’t disguise my horse, I’ll turn him loose, and go on to the next landing on foot. Hallo! what’s that?”

Bob happened to be looking through the stable door toward the shed on the bank under which the

bags of corn were stored, and saw a bright flame suddenly arise from behind it. Wondering what could be the cause of it, he stepped to the door to take a nearer view, and distinctly heard the pounding made by the paddle-wheels of an approaching steamer. "It is a signal," thought he. "There is a boat coming up, and the owner of that corn wants her to land and take it aboard. Now, if I can get on to her deck without being recognised I shall be all right."

The approach of the steamer brought about a change in Bob's programme. He hastily finished dressing himself, bundled the clothes he had taken off into his valise, and seizing his horse by the bridle led him around the stable out of sight of the house. There he found a low fence which ran between the yard and an adjoining field. His horse easily jumped over it, and Bob led him toward the nearest piece of woods, looking back now and then to make sure that he was keeping the stable between himself and any one who might happen to be passing along the road toward the landing. When the dark shadows of the trees hid him from view, he turned toward the road, threw down a portion of the fence, and led his horse through the gap. Just then the

hoarse whistle of the steamer indicated that her pilot had seen the signal fire.

“Good-by, Jack,” said Bob, choking down something that seemed to be rising in his throat, and patting the horse’s glossy neck as he spoke. “I am sorry I have abused you, Jack, and thought so little of you because you are not handsome and stylish like Don Gordon’s pony. I wish I could take back every blow I ever struck you. If I could go back with you, old fellow, you would have better treatment than you ever had before; but I must leave you now, and you must find your way home as best you can.”

Bob, however, did not leave the horse then nor for half an hour afterward. He could not bear to part with him. He led him into the bushes out of sight of the road, took off his bridle, so that he could eat on the way home if he became hungry, and then stood with his arm around the animal’s neck and his cheek resting against his mane. In the meantime the steamer came up to the landing and began taking on the freight that was stored under the shed. Presently the sound of her bell awoke Bob from his reverie.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CUB PILOT.

IF the dumb brute at his side had been a human being, capable of understanding and appreciating his feelings, Bob would not have parted from him with greater reluctance. But there was no help for it. The ringing of the steamer's bell indicated that the freight was nearly all aboard, and the next time it rang, which would be in a very few minutes, it would sound the signal for casting off the lines. Bob had purposely remained away from the boat as long as he could, for he knew that he would run something of a risk in attempting to board her. What if the constable had discovered his absence and was watching for him at the landing? Or what if some of the numerous idlers he had seen at the store in the morning should happen to be there and recognise him in spite of his disguise? Bob was obliged to take his chances on this; and for fear that the boat

might be searched, in case his escape had been discovered, he thought it best to keep away from her until she was ready to back out into the stream. She was getting ready to do it now.

The first stroke of the bell seemed to put new life into Bob. He led his horse into the road, turned his head toward home, and giving him a parting slap to put him in motion, threw his valise over his shoulder, and ran toward the landing at the top of his speed. He hurried down the main street just as any honest traveller would have done who was a little behind time, and while on the way told himself that if it were only as dark at the landing as it was there in the road, he could effect his escape without the least difficulty. But the landing-place was lighted up so brilliantly that objects could be plainly distinguished for a hundred yards around. The huge fire which had brought the boat to the shore was kept well supplied with resinous wood, and in addition to that there was a flaming torch on the steamer's fore-castle. In boarding the vessel Bob would be obliged to pass along the gang-plank in the full glare of both these lights, and in plain view of every man who might happen to be at the landing. His courage almost failed him when he thought of it; and

perhaps if he had not just then recalled some of the thrilling scenes in the lives of his favorite border-men, Wild Bill and Texas Jack, he would have turned back.

“They wouldn’t turn back if they were in my place,” said Bob, to himself. “The more danger there was in any undertaking, the better they liked it. I am in danger now, and it is a good time to show what I am made of.”

With this thought to encourage him Bob kept on toward the shed in which the corn was stored—or rather in which it had been stored, for he saw that there were not more than half a dozen bags of it remaining. He saw, too, that there were several men standing near the fire. Some of them he put down as steamboat men, and in the others he was sure he recognised some of the idlers he had seen at the store that morning. But he did not take a second look in order to satisfy himself on this point. He turned his head partly away from them, and passing through the shed fell in between two of the deck hands who were going up the gang-plank with bags of corn on their shoulders. The nearer he approached to the end of the plank, the easier he breathed; but just as he was about to step on the

steamer's deck, he happened to look toward the man who was standing under the torch beside the clerk, checking the bags as they came aboard, and was almost ready to drop when he saw that it was the horseman he had met in the morning—the one who had stopped in the road and watched his movements so closely. The man looked at him as he stepped upon the fore-castle, but did not appear to recognise him; and Bob, trembling all over with apprehension, hurried on past the stairs that led to the boiler deck, and made his way through the engine-room to the after-guard. There were some boxes piled there, and Bob quickly concealed himself behind them.

“I did it, didn't I?” said he, drawing a long breath of relief. “Five minutes more will tell the story. If I am allowed to go in peace, so much the better for me; but if that constable comes down here to search the boat, I'll take to the water. He is not going to carry me back to Rochdale. That much is settled.”

Bob had been in his concealment scarcely more than five minutes when the bell sounded the signal for letting go the lines. The steamer began to move almost immediately, one engine working forward and

the other backward to throw her bow away from the bank. Then Bob felt perfectly at his ease. He arose from his hiding-place and leaned over the rail to take a farewell view of the little settlement which would always be associated in his mind with the most unpleasant incidents of his life. The first person on whom his eyes rested was the owner of the corn—the man who checked the bags as they came aboard. He seemed to be looking directly at the runaway, and as it was not yet too late for him to hail the steamer and bring her back to the shore, Bob thought it would be a good plan to get out of his sight. Besides, some of the officers or deck-hands might have occasion to come back there, and what would they say to him if they found him hidden away among the boxes? He did not want to attract any attention if he could help it, so he picked up his valise and made his way toward the forward part of the vessel. He stopped for a few minutes in the engine-room to watch the working of the machinery, and was walking slowly along the main deck when he was startled by the sound of a commotion on the fore-castle. There was a hurrying of feet, accompanied by loud cries of “Stop her! stop her!” and then a body of men, composed of officers, passengers and deck-hands,

rushed to the port side of the fore-castle and looked over into the water.

"There's a man overboard, cap'in!" shouted the mate, looking up at the master of the steamer, who was standing on the hurricane deck, "and he's going right under the wheel. Stop her!"

Just then, a gentleman came down the stairs from the boiler deck, in two jumps, and ran quickly to the side. "Who is it?" he exclaimed.

"Georgie Ackerman!" replied a dozen voices, in concert.

"And he can't swim a stroke!" cried the gentleman, throwing off his coat and hat. "Neither can I; but I will save him or go down with him. There he is! I see his head!"

Bob saw it, too, and in an instant afterward he was in the water beside it. Securing a firm hold of the man's long hair, he raised his head from the water so that he could breathe, and swam with him away from the steamer. He knew he was in no danger of being drawn under the wheel, for it was working backward, and that, in some degree, counteracted the force of the current. The real peril to be apprehended was, that the steamer, which was rapidly swinging around, might run over him, and force

him down under the water. In order to avoid this, Bob, who had all his eyes about him, swam with his arms spread until he was out of the influence of the eddy caused by the wheel, and then he struck the current, and was carried down the stream at the rate of four miles an hour.

The man floundered and struggled desperately at first, making blood bubbles at the empty air, and trying to turn down so that he could take hold of Bob, and it was all the latter could do to manage him. But after he had recovered his breath, wiped the water from his face, and bunched the hair out of his eyes, he became calmer, and gave Bob the first opportunity he had had to see what he looked like. The man's garb had by this time been transformed from the starched rig of the post office of the fore-castle, and by the aid of the light it threw out Bob saw that the person he had rescued was not a man, but a boy about his own age. He felt much sorer after he made this discovery. He was afraid of a drowning man, but he did not doubt his ability to manage almost any boy of his own size in the water.

"Say, you!" exclaimed Bob, shifting his grasp from the boy's hair to his collar, and giving him a little shake to stir up his ideas.

"All right!" was the reply. "Who are you? Anybody I know? I don't recognise your voice."

Bob was so surprised at the calmness with which the boy spoke, that he did not answer immediately.

"I hope you have got a good hold of me, whoever you are," continued the boy; "for if you let go I shall go down like a chunk of lead. I can't swim."

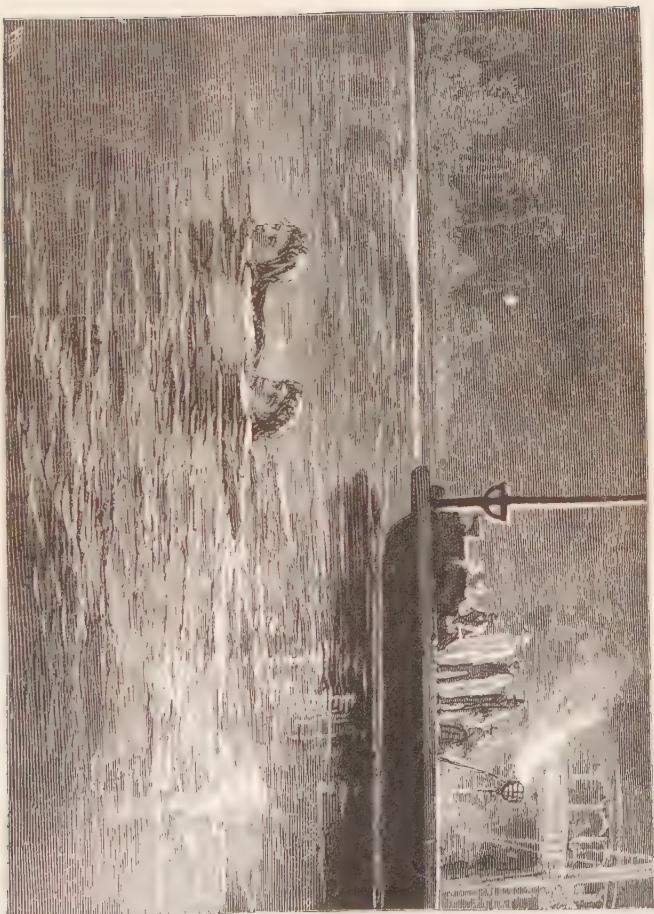
"Well, can you understand what I say to you?"
"O, yes! I am not frightened now."

"You are a cool one! that's a fact," said Bob. "Now, don't kick and thrash about any more, for that makes it hard for me to keep you afloat. Remember, that every portion of your body that is out of the water helps to sink you, while that which is *in* the water helps to buoy you up. So keep your arms by your side, and throw back your head. That will give you the best chance to breathe. They'll send a boat after us directly."

"I wish they would do it now," said the boy, who implicitly obeyed every one of Bob's orders. "If they let us stay in this current much longer they will find us at New Orleans. I don't want to go there unless I can go in my boat."

"Do you belong on the steamer?"

"Yes; I am the cub pilot!"



SAVING GEORGIE ACKERMAN'S LIFE.

"I say, George!" shouted a voice.

The boys looked up when they heard the hail, and saw that the strong current had already carried them a hundred and fifty yards below the steamer, whose bow was swinging around toward the landing again. On her hurricane-deck were a group of men, one of whom was the captain. He it was who had hailed the young pilot.

"I say, George!" repeated the captain, "who is that in the water with you?"

"I am sure I don't know," said George, in a low tone. "Who are you, fellow?"

"I am Bob Owens. But don't tell him that!" added Bob, quickly. He knew that if George pronounced his name in a tone of voice so loud that the captain could hear and understand it, it would also be heard and understood by the men about the fire, who would recognise it on the instant. "Just tell him that I am a passenger."

"Is he swimmer enough to take you to the shore?" asked the captain, when he had received George's reply. "We can't send our yawl after you for she would sink before reaching you, she is so leaky!"

"I can take care of him," shouted Bob.

This answer seemed to satisfy the captain, for he turned and walked toward the pilot-house, while the rest of the group remained to watch the boys.

"That yawl is like everything else about the old Sam Kendall—nearly played out," said George. "She has four boats, and I don't believe that any of them would float until they could be pulled across the river. You are not going to let go?" he added, as he felt Bob loosen his grasp on his collar.

"O, no. I didn't jump into the water to let you go after I caught you. I want to get you in such a position that I can tow you ashore. Put your hand on my shoulder and keep it there. That's the way. Now fall back alongside of me so that—don't be afraid," he added, as George seized his collar and held on with all his strength. "Let go!"

The boy pilot was either blessed with more than an ordinary share of courage, or else he had unbounded confidence in Bob, for he did just as the latter told him, and without any words or hesitation. He let go his hold, but he didn't sink, Bob's hand being promptly thrust out to support him.

"You mustn't clinch me that way," said Bob, earnestly; "for if you do, you'll drown us both. Don't do it again."

"I won't," answered George. "I was afraid I was going under."

"You needn't be afraid of that. The weight of your finger on my shoulder will keep your head out of water, and that is all you want. Now, fall back so that I can have plenty of elbow-room. That's the idea."

George placed his hand upon Bob's shoulder, allowed himself to swing back out of the way so that the swimmer could freely use his arms, and in this manner was towed toward the shore. Bob turned his head once or twice to say an encouraging word to him, but finding that George was not in the least frightened, he did not speak again until he reached the shore. It was hard work to swim so long a distance in that swift current, with his boots and all his clothes on, and dragging a boy behind him as heavy as himself, and he needed all his breath. He struck the bank fully a mile below the landing, and in an almost exhausted condition. George was obliged to help him out of the water. He recovered his breath in a few minutes, however, and as soon as he was able to stand upon his feet, he divested himself of his coat, pulled off his boots and stockings, and rolled up the legs of his trowsers.

“It will be easier walking now,” said he, by way of explanation. “These wet things are heavy, and I am so tired that I don’t want to carry any unnecessary weight.”

But this was not the reason why Bob pulled off some portions of his clothing. He knew that he would be obliged to board the steamer in full view of the men at the landing, and he had been thinking about it ever since he began towing George toward the shore. He had escaped recognition once, it is true, but that thought did not encourage him. He was famous now, and everybody would want to take a good look at the boy who had nerve enough to jump overboard and save another from drowning. He was glad that his valise was safe on board the boat. With that in his hand his detection would have been almost certain.

After resting a few minutes, the two boys scrambled along the bank toward the landing, but before they had gone half a mile they discovered a party of men coming in search of them. When they had approached a little nearer George informed his rescuer that he knew four of them—the captain, first mate, and Mr. Black and Mr. Scanlan, the two pilots belonging to the steamer. Bob recognised one of them,

and after running his eye over the party a second time, told himself that there was also another whom he had met somewhere very recently. He was not as glad to see them as George was to see his friends. One was the owner of the corn that had just been placed on board the steamer, and the other was—no—yes, it was the constable. Bob stopped, rubbed his eyes, and looked again ; but there was no mistake about it.

About half an hour after Bob left the house, the officer awoke and found that his prisoner was gone. He ran at once to the stable to see if his horse was gone also. He was, and this led the constable to believe that Bob had mounted him and fled up the river. Being an easy-going sort of person, who did not think it worth while to do anything to-day that could be put off until to-morrow, he decided not to begin the pursuit until morning. Then he would raise a squad of men and scour the country in every direction.

After finding that the horse was gone, the constable went down to the landing and questioned the men who were standing about the fire. They were greatly astonished to find that Bob had escaped, and declared that he could not possibly have boarded the boat

without being seen by them, for they had been at the landing ever since the steamer arrived. The officer, however, thought it best to be sure on this point, so he went on board the Sam Kendall, accompanied by some of his friends, and gave her a good looking over. He looked in almost every place except the one in which Bob was concealed, and went ashore firm in his belief that his prisoner would be found farther up the river. Bob, of course, knew nothing of this, but he did know that the constable was within speaking distance, and the sight of him deprived him so completely of his little remaining strength that he was obliged to take hold of a bush to keep himself from falling.

“What’s the matter, Bob?” asked George, who at once sprang to his side and threw his arm about his waist to support him. “You’re just tuckered out, aint you? I don’t wonder at it. Lean on me till the men come up. Hurry on, Mr. Black!”

The men were coming as fast as they could, and in a few minutes more were near enough to seize George by the hand, which they did one after the other, greeting him as though they had never expected to see him again. Then they turned to Bob.

who stood leaning against the bank, with his dripping coat muffled about his head and face.

“Don’t ask him to talk to you now,” exclaimed George, just in time to check a volley of questions. “He hasn’t breath enough to say a word. It was all he could do to get me ashore. Take him by the arms, a couple of you, and give him a lift!”

This request was addressed to no one in particular, but the two men who happened to be standing the nearest to Bob were the ones who complied with it. Then Bob wished most heartily that George had held his peace, for the men who put their strong arms through his to help him along, were the constable and the owner of the corn. Bob’s heart seemed to stop beating, and he trembled so violently that he could scarcely walk; but he dared not refuse their offers of assistance. They mistook his agitation for weakness and helped him very tenderly over all the rough places. They did not speak to him, for they were wholly engrossed with George’s account of his adventure, which he was giving to the two pilots who were supporting him. All Bob heard of it was that George was sitting on the boiler-deck railing, watching a steamer that was going down the river, and the first thing he knew he was in the water. He praised

Bob's skill as a swimmer, and seemed lost in admiration of the courage and coolness he had exhibited, but Bob heard none of it. They were nearing the landing now, and there was that huge fire still burning brightly on the bank. Bob was afraid to pass it, but his good luck had not yet deserted him, and his disguise served him a good turn. The passengers on deck, and the idlers on the bank, all looked at him with the greatest interest and curiosity, but none of the latter recognised in him the "peart and honest-looking boy," who had ridden that spotted horse into the settlement a few hours before. He was assisted up the gang-plank and to the steps that led to the boiler-deck; and there he sank down as if he were unable to go a step farther. '

"Don't stop," said George, seizing him by the arm and trying to pull him to his feet. "Come up to my room, and get your wet clothes off. You'll catch cold if you sit here in this keen wind."

Bob was well aware of that fact, but he did not say so, for he was afraid to speak, even in a whisper, for fear that the constable, or that other man, would know his voice. He stopped there because he wanted to get away from them both, and he hoped they would leave the steamer without a moment's

delay. He saw the captain run up the stairs, and his heart bounded with delight when he heard the bell ring. The constable and his friend, and the idlers who had followed the boys on board, made all haste to get ashore; the lines and gang-plank were hauled aboard; the engines were set in motion again, and when Bob saw the steamer's bow swinging toward the middle of the river, and the stretch of clear water between her guards and the bank growing wider, his courage and strength all returned to him. He went back after his valise, which he had left on the main deck, and accompanied the cub pilot to his room in Texas. His dripping garments, and George's, were given into the charge of the porter, who carried them into the galley, and when Bob had restored his sluggish circulation by a vigorous rubbing, and put on his warm, dry suit, he felt none the worse for his long swim. He and George talked incessantly while they were thus engaged, and, by the time they were dressed, began to think they were very well acquainted with each other.

"How far up the river are you going?" asked George, as they went out into the cabin and took their seats by the stove.

"I am going to St. Louis."

“Do you live there?”

“No; I don’t live anywhere,” replied Bob, who thought that, since he was fairly out in the world, it was time for him to begin to ignore the existence of home and all his relations.

“No father or mother, brothers or sisters?”

“No. When my hat is on my head my family is all covered.”

“I know how to sympathize with you,” said George. “I am almost alone in the world myself. The only relations I have are an uncle and cousin. My uncle is my guardian, and he is aboard the boat now. What are you going to do when you reach St. Louis?”

“I am going to buy a mustang and a hunting outfit and go out on the plains.”

“What is your idea of starting from St. Louis?”

“Why, don’t all the hunters and trappers fit out there? I understand that it is the headquarters of the fur trade.”

“It used to be; but it is a smashing big city now, and the hunters fit out at other points. Why don’t you go to Denver? That is hundreds of miles farther on. You see that western country is

settling up rapidly, and if you want to find fur-bearing animals you must go to the mountains."

Bob looked down at the floor in a brown study. He began to see, now, that he had made some mistakes in his calculations. He supposed that all he had to do to enter upon the life of a trapper was, to provide himself with a horse and rifle at St. Louis, and plunge at once into the wilderness, where he would find all sorts of game, from a mink to a grizzly bear. He was not very well posted in geography and history, for, while he was at school, he made it a point to neglect his books as much as he could; but he had gained an idea from some of the dime novels: he had read that St. Louis was a little hamlet—a fort, with a few log cabins clustered about it—and that, when he arrived there, he would find himself on the borders of civilization, and surrounded by Indians and trappers.

"What makes you select that mean business, anyhow?" asked George. "Do you know anything about it?"

"O, yes! I have had a good deal of experience in hunting."

"Did you ever make any money at it?"

"I never tried."

“And you never will, no matter how hard you try. You’ll go hungry half the time and ragged and dirty all the time. If you go alone you will be certain to fall in with some rough characters who will steal everything you’ve got and leave you stranded in the wilderness. Then what would you do? You don’t know the country, and suppose you should lose your way and get snowed up? That would be the last of you. I have seen lots of hunters, and I know just what sort of men they are and what sort of lives they lead.”

“Where did you ever see any?” asked Bob, in great surprise.

“In Texas, where my home is. I own a big cattle ranche a little way from the Rio Grande (or rather I shall own it when I become of age; my uncle holds it in trust for me now), and I lived there all my life until about eighteen months ago. Then I went up the Mississippi on a pleasure trip with my uncle and cousin. I fell in with Mr. Black and Mr. Scanlan, the pilots on this boat, and they said so much about life on the river that I decided to follow it; and here I am.”

“I wonder that your uncle allowed you to go so far from home,” cried Bob.

“O, he didn’t care. He lets me do just as I please. But I am going to leave the river as soon as this trip is ended. I wrote to my uncle telling him of my decision, and he came up to urge me to stay until I become a full-fledged pilot; but I have made up my mind to go home, and I want you to go with me. I need a friend more than any other boy in the world, (I may tell you why some day), and you must be a friend to me or you would not have risked your life to save mine.”

“Don’t your uncle and cousin live at your house?”

“Yes, but they are—they and I don’t—will you go?”

Bob did not answer at once. He needed a friend as much as George did—he was already so homesick that he would have been glad to get away and cry over his folly—but it was hard to give up the plans he had cherished for so many long months.

“I tell you, Bob,” added George, earnestly, “I know what I am saying when I assure you that you never can succeed in any such wild scheme as this.”

“I’ll have plenty of fun and excitement anyhow,” said Bob, “and that is what I want.”

“There is a great deal more fun in drawing an easy-chair up in front of a comfortable fire on a blus-

tering winter day and reading about it," returned George, who told himself that he knew right where Bob had got all his foolish notions. "All you know about this life that you want to enter upon, you got out of some book; and I will venture the assertion that if you could see the man who wrote it, you would find that he had never been within five hundred miles of the plains, that he had never seen anything wild larger than a pigeon, and that he couldn't tell a rifle from a shot-gun if he should see them together. Why, Bob, the men who are born hunters don't make anything at it. Take them as a class, and you will find them poor, miserable fellows. If excitement is what you want, go home with me. The Mexicans are playing havoc with the stock-raisers down there—Uncle John says they stole two hundred head of cattle not more than a month ago—and they will give you excitement enough to satisfy you. Besides you will have a fine horse to ride, plenty to eat and a tight roof to shelter you. That's more than you will have on the plains, I tell you."

As George ceased speaking the door opened and one of the pilots came into the cabin.

CHAPTER XII.

GEORGE AT THE WHEEL.

WHY, George," exclaimed the new-comer, "I thought you had turned in long ago."

"O, no," answered the young pilot. "I am going to stand my regular watch to-night. Mr. Black is at the wheel, I suppose? Mr. Scanlan, this is Bob Owens, the boy who saved my life."

The pilot greeted Bob very cordially, and said a great many complimentary things to him, praising the courage he exhibited in jumping overboard to rescue one who was unknown to him.

"He will know me better before he sees the last of me," said George. "I am going to take him to Texas with me."

"I hope you won't go," said Mr. Scanlan. "You have made a good beginning, and you ought to stay with us until you learn the river. It will not take you more than a year longer, and then you can earn your two hundred and fifty dollars a month very easily."

“I think from some things that have happened that I had better go home and see what is going on there,” replied the boy. “I am going into the pilot house now, Bob, and you must go with me and see what a good steersman I am,” he added, hastily, as if he wanted to turn the conversation into another channel. “But before we go we’ll have a cup of hot coffee and a bite to eat.”

As George said this he stepped up to the table, and throwing back the cloth which covered it, disclosed to view a substantial lunch. It was placed there every night for the accommodation of the officers who were to stand the mid-watch. The exciting scene through which they had just passed had not taken away the boys’ appetites, and they disposed of a good share of the nice things the steward had provided. When they had eaten all they wanted George drew the cover over the table again, and led the way into the pilot-house. Mr. Black greeted them very cordially and was as profuse in his compliments to Bob as Mr. Scanlan had been.

“I don’t want you up here to-night, George,” said he, after he had spent a few minutes in conversation with Bob. “Go down, and turn in. Let Bob sleep in my bunk.”

"O, I have money enough to pay my fare, and secure a stateroom," said Bob.

"The rooms are all full—we've got a big passenger list this trip—and so we shall have to take care of you," replied George. "But you don't want to go to bed now, and neither do I. I am going to take the wheel."

"But I am afraid to trust you with it," said the pilot.

"Why, don't you suppose I know this part of the river?" demanded George. "I'll hold her jack-staff on that clump of tall trees up there in the bend until her starboard smoke-stack bears on that clearing off there to the right, and then I'll——"

"I understand all about that. You know the river here as well as I do; but there's something besides snags and bars that we've got to look out for this trip."

While this conversation was going on, Bob seated himself on the elevated bench in the back part of the pilot-house, and looked about him with the greatest interest. Everything was new and strange to him. He had never travelled on a steamboat before, and he felt much more uneasy and anxious now than he did when he was battling with the cur-

rent two hours before. Guided by the skilful hands of Mr. Black, the Sam Kendall was plowing her way up the river through darkness so intense that one unaccustomed to such things would have supposed that her pilot must be blessed with more than ordinary powers of vision to be able to follow the channel. The tall trees on the bank loomed up darkly against the cloudy sky, throwing a sombre shade almost across the river, and leaving only a bright, silvery streak in the middle, which showed as plainly as the "night-hawk" on the jackstaff. Now and then the river, for a short distance in advance, would be illuminated for a moment by a bright glare from below, as the sooty, perspiring firemen threw open the furnace doors to replenish the roaring red-hot mass under the boilers, and then, their task done, and the doors closed again, the darkness, which seemed blacker than before, would once more shut out everything from view. It was long past midnight. The passengers, who had been awakened by the commotion which arose when it was discovered that the boy pilot had fallen overboard, had all retired to their staterooms again, and there was no one stirring on board the steamer except the firemen, two engineers, the watchman, who had just made

his rounds, and our three friends in the pilot-house. Yes!—there was one other wakeful person, and he made his appearance a good deal sooner than he was wanted.

“You say we must look out for something besides bars and snags, this trip,” said George. “What else is there to stand in fear of?”

“Fire!” replied Mr. Black.

George opened his eyes and looked at the pilot.

“Yes. That’s worse than snags and bars; and when you have had one boat burned under you, you’ll never want to see a spark of fire again as long as you live. I don’t see why folks patronize such a tub as this, anyhow, and they wouldn’t if they knew as much as I do. She is a rotten old hulk, and when she is under way she shakes as if she was about to fall to pieces. She’s got a cabin full of passengers, a cargo worth sixty thousand dollars in the hold, and the captain owns a big share in it. More than that: the boat is insured for thirty thousand dollars, and she isn’t worth ten.”

“Well?” said George.

“Well,” repeated the pilot, “it is a singular fact that every boat, and two or three valuable cargoes in which Captain Chamberlain has been interested,

have come to some bad end. Now mark my words, George: The old Sam Kendall has run out the full length of her rope. She'll lay her bones between here and St. Louis."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed George. "I know why you say that. There isn't a word of truth in it."

"George," said Mr. Black, solemnly, "I am a good deal older than you are, and know just what I am talking about. Now you know why I don't want to trust you alone with the wheel. But I'm pretty hungry, that's a fact, and would like a cup of coffee."

"The lunch is all ready. Bob and I have just come up from there."

"Then I guess I'll run down for just a minute, and while I am gone don't you let that wheel go out of your hands for anybody except Ed. Scanlan. Do you hear?"

"I do," replied George, as he laid hold of the spokes, "and I'll remember, too."

Mr. Black went out of the pilot-house, and Bob and George were left to themselves. The former was in his glory now. He loved a steamboat, as some boys love a horse, and others love a dog and gun. A sense of the responsibility that rested on him made his heart thrill. There was that big

steamer, swaying and groaning as she tore up the river as fast as her powerful engines could send her, a hundred and more passengers sleeping quietly in their berths below, sixty thousand dollars worth of freight stowed away on the lower deck and in the hold, and this mighty craft, with her cargo of precious lives and valuable property, was in his keeping, and moved obedient to the slightest motion of his puny arm. What confusion he could create, and what a waste of life and money he could cause in one short minute, if he chose to do so!"

"Now, Bob, isn't this glorious?" exclaimed George, with great enthusiasm.

"I——yes: but what makes her shake so? and how awful dark it is!" replied Bob, who trembled a little in spite of himself. To his inexperienced eyes it looked as though George were heading the boat squarely toward the bank.

"O, every steamer shakes more or less, but none quite so badly as this one. She is almost ready to die of old age. Her hull is not half strong enough for her engines."

"I can't understand how you can see where you are going. Can you see the water?"

"Not very plainly ; but I can see the trees on the bank, and they are what I go by."

"I wish I was out there among them," said Bob. I'd rather camp out alone than be here. What did Mr. Black mean by saying that this boat is going to lay her bones between here and St. Louis?"

"O, is that what troubles you? Well, it is all moonshine."

"But what did he mean by it?"

"I am almost ashamed to tell you. I don't know whether you know it or not, but river men are just as superstitious as sailors. I once heard a seafaring man in New Orleans say that if rats deserted a ship, it was a sure sign that something was going to happen to her. River men have some equally absurd ideas. One of their sayings is, that a minister and a gray horse will sink any boat that floats. If that is the case we are bound to go down, for a minister who owned a gray horse boarded us at New Orleans and went with us as far as Donaldsonville. That's what troubles Mr. Black ; but it doesn't trouble me half as much as this bad piece of river does that we're coming to now. There is a sawyer about here somewhere that has been doing a good deal of damage of late. The John Barleycorn went down in

this very bend about two weeks ago, on just such a night as this, and twenty-five of her passengers and crew went down with her. I'll ring the bell, and when we touch the bar I shall know just where to look for the snag."

Attached to a ring in the roof of the pilot house was a long rope leading out of the window to the tongue of the huge bell which stood on the forward part of the hurricane deck. This rope was for the use of the pilot, who, when he wanted to know how much water there was in the channel through which his boat was passing, struck the bell once or twice, according as he wanted the lead thrown on the star-board or port side of the fore-castle. George laid hold of the rope, and just then the door opened and the captain came in. The young pilot did not take a second look at him after he found out who he was, for he was a man he did not like. He rang the bell for the lead, and moved over to the other side of the wheel; the captain seated himself by Bob's side on the elevated bench, and looked out of the window; and the watchman came up and took his stand on the hurricane deck, near the bell, to pass the word.

"Where is Mr. Black?" asked the captain.

"Gone down to lunch," answered George; and just then the watchman sang out: "No bottom."

"This is Dogtooth bend, isn't it?" asked the captain.

"No, sir; it is Drayton's."

"Deep four!" shouted the watchman. (Twenty-four feet.)

"And did Mr. Black leave you here alone to take the boat through this bad river?" continued the captain.

"Yes, sir; for he knows that I am man enough to do it. I have taken her through here on a worse night than this, and during a worse stage of water, too."

"Quarter less three!" shouted the watchman. (Seventeen feet and a half.)

"I don't like this arrangement," said the captain. "You are not a licensed pilot, and if you sink the boat I shall lose my insurance."

"Mark twain!" (Twelve feet.)

"You'll be on the bar the first thing you know," exclaimed the captain, jumping to his feet. "The water is shoaling rapidly. Slow down at once."

"I'll be safe over it in two minutes more, for there is water enough where I am going," replied George.

who wished the captain would mind his own business and let him give the whole of his attention to steering the boat.

“Nine feet!” shouted the watchman.

“Stop her!” commanded the captain.

“No need of it, sir, for we are over now,” said George; and so it proved, for the next word was, “no bottom.” George rang the bell to show that he was done with the lead, and the captain continued:

“The snag the Barleycorn picked up is about here somewhere, isn’t it?”

“Yes, sir, two hundred yards above; and worse than that, a portion of the Barleycorn’s wreck lies right in the channel.”

“Well, you had better go down and tell Mr. Black to come up here. I’d rather trust him than you. I’ll take care of her until he comes,” said the captain, moving toward the wheel.

“I am able to take care of her myself,” replied the young pilot.

“But I don’t think it safe to trust you. This is my boat, and I’ve got considerable at stake. Give me the wheel.”

“I’d rather not do it, sir. Mr. Black told me

particularly to give it into the hands of nobody except himself or Mr. Scanlan."

"Well, Mr. Black is under my orders and so are you. Let go of the wheel!"

The captain made an effort to push George away from his post, but the boy clung to the spokes with all his strength, and looked out of the window for the watchman, intending to send him below to call Mr. Black; but the watchman having performed the duty of passing the word had gone his way, and George was left to fight his battles alone.

"Will you let go of that wheel?" demanded the captain, in savage tones.

"No, I will not," replied George, firmly. "I know what you want and so does Mr. Black. You want to sink this boat and get the insurance money on her; but you can't do it while I am in the pilot-house!"

This bold declaration arrested the arm which the captain had raised to strike the young pilot. He stood motionless and speechless for a moment with his clenched hand in the air, and then the blow fell, and the boy dropped to the deck. He lay stunned and bewildered for a moment and then staggered to his feet and looked out. The dreaded snag could be

dimly seen through the darkness, and, worse than that, the Sam Kendall was out of the channel and heading toward it at full speed. George thought of the sleeping passengers below, and made a desperate effort to save them and the boat. He seized one of the ropes leading from the post which supported the wheel down to the engine-room, and gave it a furious jerk. It was the stopping-bell, and the engineer was quick to respond to it. George then tried to reach the backing-bell, but the captain turned fiercely upon him and struck him to the deck again. But George had saved the boat. The port engine was stopped almost immediately, while the one on the starboard side continued to work as rapidly as ever; and although the captain threw the wheel over as quickly as he could, he was not able to make the helm overcome the tremendous power of the huge paddle-wheel. The bow of the steamer swung rapidly away from the snag, and the passengers slept on, all unconscious of the danger they had so narrowly escaped.

George scrambled to his feet again in a sadly demoralized condition. The captain's last blow was almost too much for him. He leaned upon the bench for a few seconds, and when he had somewhat recovered

himself he saw that the pilot-house door was open, that there was no one at the wheel, and that the steamer was swinging around toward the bank with fearful velocity. To spring to his post, stop the starboard engine, start the other, and bring the boat back into the channel with her head up the stream was the work of but a few minutes. Just as he had succeeded in doing it Mr. Black hurried in and seized the wheel.

All these incidents occupied but a very short time in taking place. The captain was not in the pilot-house more than three or four minutes, and during that time Bob sat on the bench, alternating between hope and fear, and watching the singular scene that was transpiring before him. He looked on with mouth and eyes wide open, but could do nothing. He expected every instant that the boat would blow up, or fall in pieces, or do some other equally dreadful thing, and he would have given everything he possessed to have been safe on shore. He breathed easier when he saw Mr. Black come in; but if he had only known it, there was another and a harder test of his courage close at hand.

"What are you ringing so many bells for,

George?" asked the pilot. "Did she take a sheer on you?"

"No, sir; but I made her take a sheer on the captain, I guess," was the faint reply.

"The old man!" exclaimed Mr. Black. "He hasn't been in here!"

"Hasn't he, though? My head tells me a different story. He knocked me away from the wheel because I wouldn't give it up to him, and tried to run the boat on the snag that sunk the Barley-corn."

Mr. Black was profoundly astonished. He looked toward Bob, who nodded his head significantly, and then began to inquire into the particulars of the case. By dint of much questioning (the boys could not tell their story connectedly, one being somewhat muddled and the other greatly excited and alarmed), he finally gained a pretty good idea of what had happened in the pilot-house during his absence. He made no comments, but, having learned all he wanted to know, devoted himself entirely to the work of steering the vessel, and at the same time he seemed to be thinking busily. George sat by Bob's side on the bench, gradually recovering from the effects of his struggle with the captain, and at

the end of half an hour declared that he was all right, with the exception of a slight headache.

"Well, you had better go down and sleep it off," said the pilot.

"O, no!" replied George; "I want to steer. You must remember, Mr. Black, that I shall not have many more opportunities to handle the wheel. As soon as we reach St. Louis, I shall——What's that?"

The pilot and the two boys held their breath and listened.

"That's so; what *is* it?" exclaimed Mr. Black; and had there been light enough in the pilot-house to enable the boys to distinguish his features, they would have seen that his face was as pale as death. There was the sound of a terrible commotion below, which was plainly heard above the puffing of the exhaust pipes, and the pounding of the paddle-wheels. Hoarse voices shouted out hurried commands, and uttered cries of alarm; heavy feet ran to and fro; and then suddenly a greater uproar arose in the cabin, as if the passengers had been aroused from their sleep to find themselves confronted by some terrible danger. A moment afterward one of the engineers on watch shouted one word through

the trumpet leading from the lower deck to the pilot-house, which almost paralyzed two of those who heard it, and explained it all.

“Fire!” shouted the engineer,

The two boys sprang to their feet in great dismay, and, for a few seconds, stood looking at each other, without possessing the power to move or speak. Bob knew, instinctively, that something dreadful had happened, but he did not fully realize the danger of their situation.

“He don’t—he can’t mean to say that the boat is on fire!” he managed to gasp, at last.

“That’s just the trouble,” answered Mr. Black.

“Why, how—how——”

“There’s no telling how the fire started, if that is what you want to know. What did I tell you, George? I am not surprised at it, for I have been looking for this, or something just as bad, to happen to the old tub for a long time. It is a wonder to me that she has stayed above water as long as she has. But she’s a dead duck now. She’ll go like a tinder-box.”

“Well, we don’t want to go with her,” cried George, in great excitement. “Turn her toward the bank. Run her ashore!”

He sprang forward to assist Mr. Black in swinging the boat around, but no sooner had they laid out their strength on the wheel than something seemed to give away all at once, the wheel flew out of their grasp, and George fell to the deck all in a heap, while Mr. Black only saved himself by clinging to a stanchion.

"What's the matter?" cried George, as he scrambled to his feet.

"The tiller rope has parted and the boat is unmanageable," was the appalling reply. "She'll burn and sink in the deepest part of the channel, and I can't swim a stroke."

When Bob heard these words he sank down on the bench almost overcome with terror. Just then Mr. Scanlan came bounding up the steps to the hurricane deck, carrying his boots in his hand and his coat over his arm. "What's the matter with you in there?" he demanded. "Are you both asleep? Don't you know that we are all in a blaze below? Run her ashore."

"We can't. The tiller rope is burned off!"

"Burned off," repeated Mr. Scanlan, as he came rushing into the pilot house. "I thought the watchman said the fire was in the galley. Well, I

swan!" he added, as Mr. Black gave the wheel a turn to show that the rope was no longer connected with it. "We must be burned half in two already."

"Who-whoop!" shouted George, through the trumpet.

"Hallo!" shouted one of the engineers in reply.

"We have no control over the rudder, and will have to do the best we can with the wheels," said George.

"All right," was the engineer's answer. "It is getting smoky, but we will stay as long as we can."

Mr. Black rang to stop, and then to back the port engine, leaving the other still working ahead, and this brought the *Sam Kendall* around until she lay directly across the channel, her bow pointing toward the left bank. Then he slowed down on the star-board engine, came ahead strong on the port, and the boat shot rapidly across the river, while the three pilots stood awaiting the result with no little anxiety. If there was water enough to float the steamer, her bow would soon touch the shore; but scarcely had this thought passed through their minds when there was a concussion that almost knocked them off their feet, rattled the smoke-stack guys furiously, and caused the tall chimneys to reel and sway about as

if they were on the point of falling overboard. The boat had run on the bar, two hundred yards from the bank, and gone on, too, with sufficient force to remain wedged fast; for, although the engines were backed with their full power, they could not start her an inch.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BURNING OF THE SAM KENDALL.

THE jig is up!" shouted one of the engineers through the trumpet, and his voice sounded as if he were half choked. "Impossible to stay here any longer. Too much smoke. Can't breathe!"

"Well, stop her and ship up before you leave," shouted Mr. Scandlan, earnestly. "Come ahead strong, and perhaps she will work closer in."

One of the engineers obeyed the order, but the other had no doubt been driven away from his post by the smoke or the flames, for his engine continued its reverse motion, while the other was working ahead. The result of this antagonism of forces was to hold the Sam Kendall perfectly motionless, in spite of the current. Her bow was fast on the bar (there were seven feet of water there, however, so that those of her passengers and crew who could not swim were in as much danger as they would have been

had the boat been anchored in the middle of the river), and when the hog-chain braces were burned away, she would break in two and sink in the channel.

During this time the fire had made rapid progress, and now thick clouds of smoke were rising on all sides, and the banks of the river were lighted up with a lurid glare, showing that all below the hurricane deck was a mass of flames. There was no one on this deck except the pilots and Bob Owens. The captain had not been seen since the alarm was given. The pilots had done all that men could do. With such courage and steadiness as they exhibited they might have succeeded in placing the boat in such a position that every one on board of her could have escaped to the shore, had they not been crippled at the start by the breaking of the tiller-rope. They could be of no further use in that pilot house.

"The jig is up with us, too," said Mr. Scanlan, gazing wistfully toward the trees on the bank which were rendered plainly visible by the light of the flames. "If I could live my life over again, my first hard work would be to learn to swim. Now, boys, you have never seen anything like this before, but I have, and a word of caution may be of service

to you. When you take to the water, as we've all got to do now, be sure there is no one near you. A drowning man's grip is like a vise. Now let us go and see if we can help anybody."

Bob followed his companions out of the pilot-house, but stopped at the foot of the stairs and stood appalled at the scene presented to his gaze. Up to this time he had moved like one in a dream, and did not seem to realize what was going on around him; but now he was fully alive to the dangers which threatened him, and he was frightened indeed. The deck on which he stood was so hot that he could not bear his hand upon it, and the flames were bursting out from both sides of the doomed steamer, whose frail, fanciful upper works burned like so much paper, and the light they threw out enabled Bob to see a long way up and down the river. The dark, muddy surface of the stream was dotted with men and women who had taken to the water and were floating down with the current on talls, chairs, or whatever else they could lay their hands upon before trusting themselves to the treacherous element. As he gazed, he saw more than one unfortunate slip off his frail support, and after making a vain effort to recover it, throw his hands above his head and sink

out of sight. Bob stood and trembled while he looked.

“Come, come, boys!” exclaimed Mr. Black, hurriedly; “this is no time to be idle. The fore-castle is crowded with passengers who must be saved.”

These words recalled George to his senses, and they even put a little life into Bob Owens. The latter began to think that he had never known what courage was. Here were these men who could not swim, and who, consequently, were in just as much danger as any person on board the boat, thinking of others instead of themselves. Bob’s first impulse after he became thoroughly waked up, was to look out for number one; but he was restrained by the actions of the pilots. He was no coward—he had proved that to everybody’s satisfaction. He was simply inexperienced, and needed an example to stimulate him and show him what ought to be done. The sequel proved that he was an apt pupil, too.

Bob looked all around for Mr. Scanlan, but could not see him. Mr. Black and George were standing near the starboard wheel-house, looking over the side; and when Bob came up he found that they were watching their partner, who was trying to get one of the steamer’s boiler deck boats into the

water. Some one had evidently been there before him, with the same object in view, for the railing was cut away, and the bow of the yawl was hanging out over the side, so that a strong push was all that was needed to send her into the river. It was fortunate that such was the case, for the fire was so hot, and the smoke so dense and stifling, that no one could stay there two minutes and live. Mr. Scandan seemed to be courting death by staying there half so long. The flames flew into his face, scorching his hair and whiskers, and now and then thick clouds of smoke would roll over him, completely hiding him from view. He threw the long painter up to Mr. Black, pushed the boat overboard, and, with Bob's help and George's, climbed back to the hurricane deck. He ran to the opposite side of the boat to obtain a breath of fresh air, wiped the smoke from his eyes, brushed off the sparks of fire that clung to his clothing, and hurried to the assistance of Mr. Black, who, by walking along the deck, was drawing the boat toward the forecastle, where some of the passengers and crew had retreated out of reach of the flames.

No language can describe what Bob saw when he looked down upon that forecastle. He never forgot

it: it troubled his sleep for many a night afterward. Men, women and children were gathered there; some crouching timidly at the foot of the jackstaff, watching the fire, which was rapidly approaching them, and others running frantically about searching for missing relatives or friends, or shrieking with terror, and appealing for the help which never came. Strong men fought for the possession of a plank or chair, and some jumped recklessly into the water, seized upon the first object that came within reach, which was oftentimes a fellow-being struggling desperately for his life, and held on with a death-grip until both went out of sight together.

Bob took it all in at a glance, and then turned his attention to the yawl, which Mr. Black had by this time drawn up to the forecastle. The frightened men shouted with delight when they saw it. A general rush was made for it, in spite of the remonstrances of Mr. Black, who called frantically for somebody to keep the crowd back, assuring them that, if they would only act like reasonable beings, there was time enough to save every soul on board the boat. But the crowd on the forecastle paid not the slightest attention to him. Probably they never heard his voice at all. They ran in a body toward

THE BURNING OF THE "SAM KENDALL."



the yawl, which in a minute more would have been filled so full that she would have sunk beneath her load, had it not been for an unlooked-for incident that happened just then.

The first to reach the boat were a couple of firemen (we are sorry we do not know the names of the cowards, so that we could publish them, for this circumstance really happened), one of whom jerked the painter from Mr. Black's grasp, while the other put his shoulder against the side, and with one strong push sent the yawl far away from the burning steamer. It was a cruel disappointment to those who were left behind, and the panic among them was greatly increased. As for the pilots, they could scarcely contain themselves. They stamped about the deck and implored and commanded, but all to no purpose. Their words fell upon deaf ears.

"Is there no one below there who has a pistol?" shouted Mr. Scanlan. "If there is, let him shoot them—shoot them down like dogs. Come back here. There's time enough to save you and all the rest!"

But the firemen did not come back. They pulled straight for the shore, and when they reached it, they sprang out and ran up the bank. The yawl,

which they did not attempt to secure, swung around broadside to the shore and floated off with the current.

"Now it is time for us to look out for ourselves," said Mr. Black, as a gust of wind brought a thin tongue of flame up from below and sent it curling across the deck. "Come on, all of us. Where's Bob?"

"Why, I saw him here just as those men ran off with the yawl," replied George. "But he doesn't seem to be in sight now. What shall I do if he has deserted me? Bob, where are you?"

No answer was returned, and Bob was not to be seen. He was gone, and the pilots could not stop to look for him, for their own situation was becoming dangerous in the extreme. The boat was burned nearly in two, and portions of the hurricane deck were falling in every moment. They would run a great risk by going down among those frightened people on the forecastle, for they could not swim, and if they found anything to serve as a life-preserver, some one would be sure to take it away from them. Their only way of escape was by the derriek at the stern. With one accord they hastened toward it, the deck bending and smoking under their feet,

and seizing the guys that supported the derrick, they swung themselves down to the afterguard.

And where was Bob all this while? He was safe, and exerting himself to prevent further loss of life among the passengers and crew. We said he was inexperienced, and needed an example to wake him up and show him what ought to be done. He had two good ones in Mr. Black and Mr. Scanlan. He wanted to assist them in some way, but he did not know how to go about it until he saw the cowardly firemen running off with the yawl; then he decided upon his course in an instant. He knew that the men intended to make the best of their way to the shore, and that they would have no further use for the boat after they got there. If he could only secure the yawl after they abandoned it, he might be able to bring it back to the steamer in time to save somebody. He ran to the side and looked over. The river at that moment happened to be clear of people, and Bob jumped off without hesitation. It was a high leap from the hurricane deck to the water, but he took it with perfect confidence, and when he arose to the surface struck out vigorously for the shore. The current carried him down the stream in spite of all his efforts to prevent it, but this proved to be a

point in his favor; for by the time he had accomplished half the distance he had to swim, the firemen had reached the bank and deserted the yawl, which was now floating slowly down the river. The current carried it at about the same rate of speed that it carried the swimmer, so that she happened to be at the very point where he touched the shore.

To climb into the boat, discard his dripping coat, which prevented the free use of his arms, catch up the oars, and turn the yawl's head toward the burning vessel, was the work of but a few seconds. He laid out all his strength, but the current was strong, the boat too heavy to be easily propelled by one person, and she seemed to move through the water at a snail's pace.

Bob soon became aware that he was seen, and that his approach was awaited with no little anxiety and impatience. Entreaties, commands, and offers of heavy rewards were addressed to him; but he was doing his best already, and the promise of millions of money and the prospect of saving every imperilled life, would not have added to his strength or powers of endurance. He knew that the yawl would not carry all the men and women on the fore-castle, and his first thought was of the three pilots. If he

could save them, the work of saving the passengers and crew would be comparatively easy, for they would know just how to go about it. He had seen them all on the hurricane deck when he was climbing into the boat, but they were not to be seen there now. The steamer was so nearly in ruins that it did not seem possible that any one could live on her much longer, and Bob, alarmed for the safety of his friends, ceased his efforts at the oars, and stood up in the boat to look for them. To his great joy he saw three heads bobbing up and down in the water near the stern of the steamer, and one of them he was sure he recognised.

“Hold out just a minute longer, George!” he shouted. “I’m coming!”

Bob sprang to his oars with redoubled energy, and pulled to the rescue of the young pilot, unmindful of the cries and entreaties of those on the fore-castle, who saw that he was rowing away from them. He reached the steamer in a few minutes, but looked in vain for his friend. He pulled around the stern of the boat several times, and eagerly scanned the river in every direction, but not a living being was to be seen. Convinced, at last, that he had been mistaken, and hoping to find George and the two pilots

among those on the fore-castle, Bob pulled around the steamer again, and, fully sensible of the danger he was about to encounter, stopped a few feet from the guards, on which were gathered fifty or more frightened people, all pushing and crowding one another, and calling to him to bring the yawl nearer.

"Go back, every one of you!" shouted Bob. "Come one at a time, and I will save you all!"

"Bring that boat up closer!" cried several voices in concert.

"I'll not come an inch nearer until you all go back!" yelled Bob, in reply. "Let the women and children get in first. I can take them ashore and come back in time to save the rest of you. Why don't you stop shouting, and pushing, and listen to what I am saying to you?" screamed Bob, who saw that not the least attention was paid to his words. "Go back, I say!"

But he might as well have appealed to so many stumps or rocks. His arguments would have made just as much impression upon them. While he was talking he gave a stroke or two with his oars, now and then, to keep the yawl from drifting down the stream, and once in his excitement he sent the bow of his craft altogether too close to the steamer for

safety. He saw his mistake on the instant, but it was too late to correct it, for his boat was half full of men and women before he had time to think twice. They jumped in on top of one another; those who fell into the water and were able to reach the gunwales began to climb in over the sides, and Bob was borne down, and held, as though a mountain had fallen on him. He struggled desperately to free himself, for something told him that the boat was sinking. Feeling himself relieved, for one instant, of the immense weight that held him down, he managed to get upon his feet, and, catching up an oar, sprang overboard just as the water began to pour in over the sides of the yawl. Remembering Mr. Scanlan's words of warning, he struck out vigorously to put a safe distance between himself and the drowning people, and was frightened almost out of his senses when he saw a powerful man spring out of the yawl, and make the most strenuous efforts to seize him. As quick as thought, Bob thrust the blade of his oar into the outstretched hands which closed upon it with a grasp of iron.

"Don't desert me, boy," cried the man. "Save me and I will make you rich!"

"I'll do the best I can for you," replied Bob,

"but listen to me, now, and don't try to take hold of me," he added, quickly, seeing that the man was coming hand over hand toward his end of the oar. "Go back, or I will leave you to take care of yourself."

"This oar won't hold me up," exclaimed the man, who, frightened as he was, could hear and understand every word Bob said to him.

"Yes, it will. A chip as large as your hand placed under your chin will enable you to keep your head above water. Take hold of the blade and keep yourself off at arm's length and I will tow you ashore."

The man did not pay as much attention to his directions as the cub pilot had done, for he continued to work his way toward Bob's end of the oar, and finally reached out his hand to lay hold of his collar; but Bob was too quick for him. He went down like a piece of lead and came up at the other end of the oar.

"Go back where you belong," he shouted, as the man turned about and came toward him again. "I don't want to desert you, but if you don't keep away from me I shall be obliged to do so."

"This oar won't hold me up," repeated the man in terrified tones.

"It won't if you try to climb on top of it, but it will if you just keep hold of it with your hands. As soon as I see something large enough to float you I will bring it to you."

"Bob, is that you?" exclaimed a familiar voice. Bob looked up in great surprise, but could see no one, for the smoke rolled over him in a thick cloud, completely shutting out the steamer from his view. But he heard a slight splashing in the water near him, and when the smoke lifted a little he discovered the cub pilot clinging to the rudder. "Why, George," he cried, "how came you there?"

"I let myself down by this rope," was the reply; and, as before, George did not seem to be in the least alarmed. "The pilots and I went into the engine room after some boards to serve as life-preservers, but it was so smoky in there I couldn't stay. They got some, but I didn't."

"Where are they now?" asked Bob.

"Gone down the river on their boards. They tried to take me with them, but the current carried them off, and I couldn't swim after them. How am I ever going to get away from here?"

"I'll get you away, you may depend upon that," was Bob's encouraging reply. "Now, sir, I will give this oar up to you. Just keep your hands on it, as I told you, and it will float you."

"O, boy, don't leave me!" cried the man, as Bob let go the oar and struck out to his friend's assistance. "Come back here and take care of me."

"Uncle John!" cried George, in great amazement.

Uncle John (if it was he) was much too terrified to pay any attention to his nephew. He continued to call for Bob long after the smoke had concealed him from view, but the boy did not answer him. He knew that the man was in no danger, if he would only follow the instructions that had been given him, but it was not so with George. The latter had nothing to support him, and, when the fire came farther aft, and compelled him to let go his hold on the rudder (as it would in a very few minutes), that would be the last of him.

The young pilot felt perfectly safe when Bob came in sight, but even then he was not out of danger, for it was all Bob could do to reach him. He was obliged to swim some distance against a strong current in order to do it, and had the boat been ten

feet farther away he would have failed in the attempt. As it was, he was entirely out of breath when he seized the hand George extended to him, and it was fully five minutes before he could speak to him. George saw that he was almost exhausted, and waited patiently for him to recover himself.

"Was that man your uncle?" said Bob, at length.

"What made you ask about him?" inquired George.

"O, I was just thinking," said Bob, indifferently.

"Yes, and I can tell you what you were thinking about. You think it strange that he should want you to save him, and leave me to go down."

"O, when men are as frightened as he was, they are not themselves," replied Bob.

"There's something in that; but would you believe me if I were to say that, if he were the best swimmer in the world, he would not try to save me if he saw me sinking?"

"No, I wouldn't," replied Bob, promptly.

"Then I won't say so. Isn't it getting a little too hot and smoky here?"

Bob thought it was; and having by this time fully recovered his breath, he was ready to trust himself to the current again. George, being duly instructed,

placed his hand upon his shoulder, allowed himself to swing back out of reach of Bob's arms, and in this way was towed from the burning steamer. Bob swam as straight across the river as the current would allow him to go, and at the end of twenty minutes seized some overhanging bushes on the bank. He helped George to climb out, and George in turn assisted him; for by this time Bob was nearly exhausted.

"What would have become of me if you hadn't been on the boat? This is the second time you have saved my life," said George, gratefully.

"Shall I tell him who and what I am?" thought Bob, as he seated himself on the ground, panting loudly. "If he knew that I am a runaway and a thief—for I *am* a thief," added Bob, whose recent experience seemed to have opened his eyes to some things to which he had been blind before—"if he knew that, would he ever speak to me again? Would he be so anxious to have me go home with him?"

Bob was in a very sober frame of mind just now. He had been near to death twice since he left home—how near no one knew except himself. On both occasions while he was towing George toward the

shore, he had overtaxed his strength, and it was all he could do to save himself and his new friend. During those moments of suspense it seemed to him that he lived over every hour of his life. He thought of his home and those he had left there as he had never thought of them before. It was right on the end of his tongue to say to the young pilot—

“George, I have told you a pack of falsehoods. I have a home, three sisters, and as kind a father and mother as ever lived. I stole a hundred and sixty dollars and ran away so that I might spend the money for a breech-loading gun and a jointed fish-pole.”

How worthless these things seemed to Bob now! He would willingly have given up all hopes of ever owning them for just one look at his mother's face. He did not speak the words that arose to his lips, for he knew that in order to be consistent he must follow them up by going home and facing the consequences of his folly. He wasn't brave enough to do that then, but he did it afterward, and, besides, he made all the reparation in his power. He did it, too, at such cost to himself that every one who knew the circumstances was willing to forgive him.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SPECIMEN TRAPPER.

THE boys, warned by their recent narrow escape, sat on the bank in gloomy silence and watched the Sam Kendall as she was slowly consumed before their eyes. They noticed that her forecastle was deserted now, and Bob shuddered when he asked himself how many of those he had seen there a short half hour before had found a watery grave. Presently the hog-chain braces parted with a loud crash, and the flames blazed up brightly for a moment as the stern of the vessel floated off with the current. In a few minutes it disappeared around the bend.

"That's the last of the Sam Kendall," said George, sadly, "and, although I know that she was an unseaworthy old tub, I couldn't feel worse if I were compelled to stand by and see my own home burned up. Indeed she was my home—the only one I had."

“Why, I thought you had a home in Texas, and that you are going back there,” said Bob.

“I am going back to Texas, but I am not going home. I wouldn’t be welcome. There are two persons who would be glad if I should never show my face there again.”

“Who are they?” asked Bob.

“That man who wanted you to save him and let me go down is one of them, and his son, my cousin Ned, is the other. You see, my father died about four years ago, leaving all his property in trust to Uncle John, whom he appointed my guardian, and who was to take care of it until I became of age. Then he was to turn it over to me, less a certain sum which was to be paid to him for his services. If anything happened to me, the property was all to go to my cousin, Ned.”

“Well?” said Bob, who now began to exhibit some interest in the narrative.

“Well, they want that property and have tried hard to get it. Uncle John tried to-night. You saw that a good many of the passengers were aroused from their sleep by the confusion that was created when I fell overboard, didn’t you? Uncle John was not one of them.”

“What was the reason?”

“I will tell you what happened, and you can draw your own conclusions. While I was sitting on the boiler-deck railing watching that steamer, I heard a stealthy footstep behind me, and before I could turn around to see who was coming, I felt a pair of hands on my back, and got a push that sent me over-board.”

“Do you mean to say that your uncle pushed you over?” demanded Bob, greatly amazed.

“That is just what I mean. You wondered that he would let me go so far from home! He would furnish me with money enough to take me to Europe, if I asked him for it, and be glad to let me go. You see the more I travel around the more danger I am in.”

“Well, you have one consolation,” said Bob, after thinking a moment. “You’ve got money, and can have all the nice things you want.”

When Bob said “nice things,” he meant breech-loading shot-guns, sail boats, jointed fish-poles, and handsome saddle-horses.

“But I would change places to-night with any bootblack in St. Louis who has a home and a kind father and mother,” said George, earnestly. “What

surprises me is that not one boy in ten appreciates his blessings."

"That's so," thought Bob. "You don't, for one. You have money and don't care for it. If I had it I shouldn't be here now."

"There's Tony Richardson, for example," continued George. "I used to run on one of his father's boats, and became well acquainted with him. I envied him, and often thought he must be the happiest boy in the world; but he was the most discontented. He wanted to go to sea, but his father wouldn't let him; and the next I heard of Tony was that he had stolen fifty dollars and run away. But he didn't stay long, I tell you. The next trip but one that I made down the river, I saw somebody on the levee in New Orleans whom I thought I recognised; and when I went up closer to him I found that it was Tony Richardson. But he didn't look much like the spruce young fellow who used to come into the pilot-house when we were running up to the coal fleet, and ask me to let him steer for me. He looked worse than any tramp I ever saw. He felt so ashamed of himself that at first he denied that he was Tony Richardson; but I very soon gave him to understand that he couldn't fool me, and then he told me

the story of his adventures. He had shipped at New Orleans on a coasting vessel bound to Rio, but before he had been twenty-four hours out of port one of the crew stole the money he had left, the mate gave him a black eye because he didn't obey some order he did not understand, and by the time Tony reached Havana he had had quite enough of the sea. He deserted as soon as his vessel touched the shore, and hunted up a steamer that was about to start for the States. He tried to ship on her, but she didn't want any more hands, so Tony stowed himself away in the hold, and never came out until the vessel was three or four hours out at sea. Of course the captain couldn't turn back to put him ashore, so he had to bring him on. When I found him Tony was looking for a chance to ship as deck hand in order to work his way back to St. Louis. He is at home now, and the last time I saw him he told me that he had made up his mind to stay there."

"But what makes you think that your uncle wants to get rid of you?" asked Bob, who did not care to hear any more about runaways and their experience. He knew more about the matter already than George could have told him if he had talked until daylight.

"I know it because he has shown it so plainly.

Everybody in our neighborhood knows what he is trying to do, and I have been warned more than once. I shouldn't be here now if I hadn't had somebody besides Uncle John to look out for me. Mr. Gilbert, our nearest neighbor, used to be one of father's herdsmen. He has exercised a fatherly care over me for years; and when I told him that I was going to leave home to become a pilot, he declared that it was the best thing I could do. I would be safer anywhere in the world, he said, than I was there in Texas."

"Then I should think you would be afraid to go back," said Bob, who now wished that George had not taken so great a liking to him. If he was in danger of his life, as his conversation seemed to imply, Bob did not want to go with him any nearer to Texas than he was at that moment. He did not long for a life of adventure as he did a few days before.

"I am going back because Mr. Gilbert advises it," replied George. "I am going to have a new guardian appointed in Uncle John's place. He is selling off everything he can lay his hands on, and the first I know I'll not have a single head of stock left."

This was but one of the many topics of conversation which engrossed the attention of the two boys during the half hour that they stood there on the bank, beating their hands and stamping their feet to keep them warm, and even this was not carried on as connectedly as we have written it. They would talk awhile about the steamer (all they could see of her now was a bed of coals, which marked the spot where her bow was still hard aground), and speculate concerning the fate of her passengers and crew. Then they wished that Bob had a coat, and that they had some matches, so that they could start a fire; wondered how far away, and in what direction, the nearest house lay from them, and asked each other how long it would be before a boat would come along and pick them up, and, when she came, whether she would carry them up or down the river. Then there would be long intervals of silence, during which their very ideas seemed to freeze up, so that they could not talk at all. George had a good deal to say about himself, hoping that he might induce Bob to give him some scraps of his own history; but in this he was disappointed. Bob preferred to listen.

The story of the young pilot's life, as Bob heard

it that night, made him open his eyes. We should be glad to report it here, but it is too long. We may take it up again at some future time, together with the history of the adventures and exploits of that other runaway, Tony Richardson. Our business, just at present, is to see what became of Bob in the end, and how much he increased his happiness by running away from home; and what we have told of George's story is simply to explain what happened afterward.

"This will never do," exclaimed George, at length. "I can't stand this any longer. I am getting so cold I can hardly talk plainly."

"Where shall we go?" asked Bob. "There may not be a house within ten miles of us."

"I don't care where we go so long as we keep moving. Let's take a last look at the Sam Kendall and start out. I hope all the passengers and crew escaped with their lives."

"So do I, but it is hardly probable. I could have saved every man, woman and child on that fore-castle if I could only have made them listen to reason. You and I could have made half a dozen trips with the yawl between the vessel and the shore

before she broke in two. Hark! Wasn't that the bark of a dog?"

The two boys listened a moment, and presently the sound that had attracted Bob's attention was repeated. It was so faint and far off that they could scarcely hear it, but it put new life into them.

"It is a dog, sure enough," said George, "and where there is a dog there must be a house somewhere about. Let's see if we can find him."

With a farewell glance at the glowing bed of coals that pointed out the wreck of the steamer, the boys crawled to the top of the bank and turned their faces in the direction from which the barking of the dog sounded. They had undertaken a task of considerable difficulty, as they found before they had gone many yards, for the woods were so thick and dark that even Bob, who could find his way in the night almost as well as he could in the daytime, was often at fault. The distant watch-dog was accommodating enough to give a yelp or two for their guidance every few minutes, but they did not seem to be drawing any nearer to him, and finally the animal, as if dissatisfied with the slow progress they were making, became silent.

Bob led the way for a mile or more through dark-

ness so intense that he could not see the nearest trees, and when at length he and his companion became so weary and disheartened that they talked strongly of giving it up as a hopeless task, and sitting down and waiting until daylight came, they worked their way out of a dense thicket through which they had been stumbling for the last ten minutes, and found themselves in a smooth, well-beaten path. They made more rapid headway after this, and when they had gone a few rods farther, Bob announced that he could see a faint light shining through the bushes. It looked to him, he said, as though it was shining through cracks between logs; and if that was the case there must be a house close at hand. Believing that they had stumbled upon the home of the watch-dog, and that he might not like it if he and George approached his master's dwelling without giving some notice of their presence, Bob halted in the path and shouted out the warning so familiar to every one who has travelled through the rural districts of the South--

“Hollo, the house! Don't let your dogs bite!”

It was well that Bob was thoughtful enough to take this precaution, for he had scarcely finished his hail when such a chorus of hoarse yelps and

growls arose out of the darkness that the boys' hair fairly stood on end. At the same instant a loud rustling among the leaves and bushes told them that they had aroused, not one dog, but a dozen, and that they were coming. They had nothing with which to defend themselves, and it would have been of no use to run, even if they could have seen which way to go. In a moment more they would have been surrounded by the fierce animals; but just then a door was jerked open, a flood of light streamed out into the darkness, and a bare-headed and bare-footed man appeared with a club in his hand.

"Begone, ye brutes!" he shouted, throwing his club into the midst of the pack, which scattered right and left, and concealed themselves in the bushes. "Come on, strangers, whoever ye be, they won't pester ye. Some more of the Kendall's passengers, I reckon, aint ye?" he added, when the boys came up. "I reckoned so, 'kase one on ye haint got no coat on."

"Yes, we were on the Kendall when she was burned. Have you seen any of the passengers or crew?" asked George, hoping that, if he had, Mr. Black and Mr. Scanlan might be among the number.

"Yes, I picked up one, an' I might have saved

more if I had only had a boat. I used to be a right peart swimmer in my young days, but the rheumatiz an' ager pester me so bad that I can't go into the water no more. Howsomever, when I stood thar on the bank an' heard somebody a callin', I jest jumped in and jerked him out."

"I am glad you were able to do that much," said Bob, when the old man paused, as if to give the boys an opportunity to say something in praise of the deed he had performed.

"I shan't be able to walk ag'in fur a month, I know," continued the man. "He's in the house now, takin' a wink of sleep, an' restin' while his clothes is dryin'."

"What sort of a looking man is he?" asked George.

"O, he's a chunky, good-lookin', gray-whiskered an' gray-headed——"

"That's enough," said George, with a deep sigh of regret. "It isn't either of my friends, for they are not gray-headed. May we go in and sit by your fire?"

"Yer as welcome as the flowers in May. Sorry I haint got a bed to offer ye, but that fellar's got the only one I own."

“We are greatly obliged to you, but we don’t want a bed. We only want to stay long enough to get dry and warm, and then we’ll strike out. I am anxious to find my partners. How far is White River Landing from here by the road—if there is one?”

“A matter of ten miles, an’ ye can’t miss the way.”

The boys followed the old man into the cabin, and Bob, who was in advance of George, looked about to find the passenger who had been rescued by their host. He was lying on the floor, in the darkest corner of the room, wrapped up in a tattered blanket, and his clothes were drying in front of the fire. A couple of stakes had been driven into the dirt-floor, and the garments were hung upon them. As Bob looked at the man, he was sure that he saw him turn his face to the wall and draw the blanket over his head. He merely noticed the act, but thought nothing of it.

The building in which the boys now found themselves was a log cabin, built in the most primitive style. There was a roaring fire on the hearth, which threw out so bright a light that everything in the interior could be plainly seen. The cabin looked as

poverty-stricken as the owner, and he looked worse than Godfrey Evans. It was destitute of every comfort; the only things in the shape of furniture that the boys could see being a rifle, resting on a couple of pegs over the door, an axe leaning in one corner, and a battered coffee-pot, frying-pan, and a few tin dishes, which were piled promiscuously in one another. The sight of the coffee-pot suggested something to Bob. "George," said he, "don't you think a cup of hot coffee would be very refreshing?"

"Taint to be had in this yere ranche, stranger," said the old man, quickly. "Ye see I aint had no luck yet. It's just a trifle too 'arly in the season."

"Luck!" repeated George.

"Yes. I kalkerlate to have a right smart chance o' trappin' here on the sunk lands jest as soon as cold weather sets in in 'arnest."

As the old man said this he went out to bring in another stick of wood for the fire, and George turned and looked at Bob without speaking. "O, I know what you are thinking about," said the latter. "You want to know how I would like to live like this."

"That's just it," replied George. "How would you? This man is a fair specimen of a professional

trapper. You can see that he is ragged and dirty, and that he has nothing to wear on his head or his feet. He talks about cold weather setting in in earnest! What will he do then? If he doesn't starve he'll freeze. I'll warrant he's hungry now," added George; and to prove it he said to the man when he came in, "If you can't give us a cup of coffee can you dish us up something to eat? Anything, no matter what it is."

"Sorry I can't do it, stranger," was the reply. "I eat the last of my bacon a week ago."

"What in the world does he live on, then?" asked Bob, when the old man had gone out after another stick of wood.

George pointed silently toward the corner in which the pots and pans were stowed. Bob looked and saw there about half a peck of corn in the ear. Parched corn was all the old man had to eat now that his bacon was gone. What his dogs lived on was a mystery. Bob took another look around the cheerless hovel, thought of the comfortable home he had so recklessly left, and asked himself if this was the wild, free and glorious life that he had wasted so many hours in dreaming about.

As there were no chairs in the cabin the boys

were obliged to hold their clothes in front of the fire in order to dry them. While they were thus engaged they talked over their plans, and made up their minds just what they would do—or rather George laid the plans and Bob agreed to them. They conversed in low tones, so as not to disturb the sleeping passenger, and kept their eyes directed toward his corner more than half the time, hoping that he would turn over, and give them a view of his face, for they wanted to see who he was; but he did not move more than two or three times while they were in the cabin, although Bob was sure that he once detected him in the act of turning his head slightly as if to hear what they were saying. If George had seen it his suspicions might have been aroused.

After Bob had wrung the water out of his clothes, he did not neglect to overhaul the contents of his money belt. He had examined them while he and George were changing their wet clothing in the latter's stateroom on board the steamer, and then they were found to be all right, the precautions he had taken having proved amply sufficient to protect the bills from injury. Of course some of them were wet, but they were not defaced. He had then, in accordance with George's advice, put all the bills into his

belt ; and after wrapping the oiled silk around them he had further protected them by inclosing them in a roll of thick brown paper. This made rather a bulky package to go into his belt, but the bills were effectually protected, as he found when he examined them by the light of the trapper's fire.

"It is lucky that you are so wealthy, Bob," said the young pilot, after they had satisfied themselves that the money was not injured, "for if we were strapped I don't know what we should do. Mr. Black pays me twenty-five dollars a month for steering for him, but even if we should find him, which I don't much expect to do, I couldn't get any money from him, for he will have to go to St. Louis before he can collect any himself. I could get all we need by writing to my friends in 'Texas, but it would take two weeks at least to get an answer from them, and where would we find food and shelter in the meantime?"

"We might be fortunate enough to run across your uncle somewhere," said Bob. "He'll be picked up by the first boat that goes up or down the river, if he held fast to that oar and did as I told him."

"I certainly hope he has been picked up long be-

fore this time," replied George. "But he wouldn't give me any money."

"Why, I thought you said he would give you enough to take you to Europe!"

"So he would; but he wouldn't give me a red cent to take me home. He doesn't want me there. I'll go all the same, if you will stand by me."

"I will," replied Bob, promptly.

At the end of an hour the boys were thoroughly dried and warmed. By this time the day began to dawn and they made ready to start for White River Landing. After they had received particular directions from the trapper in regard to the road they were to follow, they presented him with a five-dollar bill, which Bob, at George's suggestion, had kept out of his money-belt for this purpose, and without waiting to hear his expressions of gratitude, bade him good-by and left the cabin.

No sooner had the sound of their footsteps died away than the rescued passenger threw aside the blanket that enveloped him, and sat up on his hard couch. "Say, you," he exclaimed, roughly addressing the old man, who stood in front of the fire turning the greenback over and over in his hands as if

to satisfy himself that it was genuine, "are my clothes dry yet?"

"I reckon they be," replied the host, feeling of the garments, one after the other. "I've 'tended to 'em purty clost."

"Then hand them to me and go out on the bank and hail the first boat that goes down the river. So George is going to take that fellow to Texas and make a brother of him, is he?" continued the passenger, as the old man hurried from the cabin to obey his order. "I think not. If either of them gets there after what I have heard, it will be my own fault."

Just then the whistle of a steamer echoed through the woods, and a few minutes afterward the old man burst into the cabin exclaiming: "I've stopped her. She's the Silver Moon, an' hove in sight just as I reached the bank. She's roundin' to, now."

The passenger hurried on his clothes, and without stopping to thank the old man for the services he had rendered him, rushed out of the cabin. Reaching the bank just as the Silver Moon's gang-plank was being shoved out, he boarded the vessel, which came about and resumed her journey toward New Orleans.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LOST POCKET-BOOK.

THE boys had no trouble in following the road that led to the little collection of houses known as White River Landing. The ten miles did not seem very long to them, for George beguiled the way with many thrilling and amusing incidents drawn from his own experience, and the journey was completed almost before they knew it.

They found the little settlement in a state of intense excitement. The news of the burning of the Kendall had spread through the country for miles around, and the planters had come in by dozens to learn all the particulars. No sooner did the boys appear in sight than they were surrounded by a crowd of men who asked questions much faster than they could answer them. George told their story, making Bob out a perfect hero (the latter was not a little abashed when he found himself stared at as if he had been some curious wild animal, and could not

help asking himself what these men, who complimented him so highly, would have thought of him if they had known how he came to be on board the Sam Kendall); and when the narrative was finished one of the listeners, who proved to be the store-keeper, seized Bob by the arm and led him away. "Come with me," said he. "A brave boy like you shall not be allowed to run around in his shirt-sleeves on a cold day like this."

He conducted Bob to his store, one side of which was filled with clothing, and told him to help himself to the best coat he could find. Bob objected, declaring that he had money enough to buy all the clothing he needed, but the merchant would not listen to him. He had made up his mind to do something for the boy, and he had his own way. When Bob came out of the store a few minutes later he wore a much better coat than the one he had lost. He found George still in conversation with the planters. They told him that every canoe and yawl that could be found had been brought into service; that a good many of the passengers and crew had been rescued while they were floating by the landing; that the wharf-boat was loaded with furniture and portions of the cargo that had been picked

up; that some of the passengers had gone to New Orleans on the Silver Moon and another boat whose name they did not mention, to make a new start for St. Louis; and that those who remained at the landing were being cared for by the settlers while waiting for a boat bound up the river. Then George made inquiries concerning his partners. They were well-known pilots, and some of the planters said they were personally acquainted with them; but they had seen nothing of them.

"I am afraid I shall not find them," said George, sadly, as he and Bob made their way toward the wharf-boat, which they found filled with the charred remains of the Kendall's cargo.

"They may have been picked up before they reached the landing, or they may have floated by without being seen," said Bob.

"There is some consolation to be found in that," replied George, brightening. "If they are alive, I'll see them some day. I owe a great deal to them."

During the two hours that they remained on board the wharf-boat the boys were never left alone. They had a crowd of eager listeners around them all the time. They talked until they were tired, and were glad, indeed, when some one announced that a

steamer, bound down, had just come in sight. A strip of canvas was stretched around the railing of the hurricane deck, bearing the words "For New Orleans," and that told the boys that she was the boat they were waiting for. They boarded her as soon as her gang-plank was shoved out, and were at once surrounded by another crowd of people, who, having seen the smoking wreck of the Kendall (which was still fast on the bar), wanted to know how it came there. George told the captain all about it, and put a stop to further inquiries from the passengers by elbowing his way to the office and asking for a stateroom, to which he and his companion were promptly shown. When they had closed the door behind them they both gave a sigh of relief, and Bob began to pull off his coat.

"Are you tired enough to go to bed?" asked George. "I shall not wait until night. I am going into the pilot-house to keep watch. We may pick up somebody, you know."

"I am not going to bed," answered Bob. "I want to take out money enough to pay our passage. Have you any idea how much it will be?"

"Passage!" repeated George. "Why, man,

we're shipwrecked. Who would take money from us? We are not supposed to have any."

"But, they might ask us for some."

"No, they won't. You'll see that we will get the best of everything, and not a word will be said to us about money. Hold fast to all you've got. You'll need it, if you are going to buy repeating rifles and revolvers, and hunting-knives, as you said you were, when we reach Galveston. You can't get a Winchester rifle for less than forty-five dollars, and you will find that the cartridges for it will cost you a snug sum too."

Bob put on his coat again, and the two boys sat on the lower bunk and waited until the steamer was under way, and the passengers had had time to disperse about the boat, and then they opened the door and hurried into the barber shop. They washed their hands and faces, brushed their hair and clothing, blacked their boots, and, having thus greatly improved their appearance, made their way toward the pilot-house. At the head of the stairs which led to the hurricane deck, George stopped and pointed down the river.

"Do you see that long point running out from the left-hand bank?" said he. "If we make a land-

ing within the next fifty miles, without being hailed, we shall make it there. It is Rochdale."

Fortunately for Bob, George just then turned his back and started toward the pilot-house, so he did not see the sudden start the runaway gave when these words fell upon his ear. He was going toward his home again as fast as a strong current and a swift boat could take him. Suppose the steamer should make a landing there! He would conceal himself, of course; but what good would that do? Some of the many idlers who were always to be found about Silas Jones's store would come aboard, and they would be sure to hear all about the burning of the Kendall. They would be equally sure to hear his name mentioned, for George had given it with his own to the captain, in the hearing of all the passengers. That would excite their wonder, and would be almost certain to lead to an investigation; and how would he feel when he was hunted up and pulled out of his hiding-place, with David Evans's hard-earned money on his person, and five dollars of it gone? How heartily he wished now that he had given it into the hands of its lawful owner! If he had done that, he would have made himself famous

in the settlement, and everybody would have thought he was the best fellow in the world.

"Come on, Bob," exclaimed George. "What are you standing there for?"

As Bob could not leave the boat unless he jumped overboard, he had nothing to do but to go on with her, and trust to luck; so he followed George into the pilot-house, and, with his companion, was warmly welcomed by the man at the wheel. He sat on the bench by George's side, while the latter related the story of their adventures in detail, and, fastening his eyes on the point before him, thought of the little settlement there, and the people who lived in it. When there was a pause in the conversation he managed to say to the pilot:

"Do you stop at—I mean—what is your next landing?"

"I don't know," was the reply; "but I can soon find out. Who-whoop!" shouted the pilot, through the trumpet that led down to the office.

"Ay! ay!" shouted the clerk.

"Anything for Rochdale?"

"Nary thing," was the encouraging response.

The pilot then went on to tell what the name of their next regular landing was, and how far down

the river it was located, but Bob heard none of it. He had learned that the boat was not going to stop at Rochdale, and that was enough for him. But, would she be signalled from the shore? That was the question he kept asking himself, and it was answered about two hours afterward, when they came within sight of the landing. How his heart throbbed as he drew near to the familiar place, and how glad he would have been if he could have gone back there with everything just as it was before he stole that money! He noticed, with no little uneasiness, that there was a larger number of idlers than usual congregated on the levee, and he gazed anxiously at them, expecting every moment to see a white handkerchief waved in the air. But his fears proved groundless. The steamer held steadily on her course, and in a quarter of an hour more Rochdale was out of sight. Bob was very miserable and gloomy after that. He did not recover his usual spirits until the steamer landed at New Orleans; and then the sights and sounds of the city, which were new to him, seemed to draw his attention to other matters, and to put a little life into him.

As soon as the boat was made fast to the levee the two boys went ashore, and George led the way to a

hotel, which was much frequented by steamboat men. He seemed to be well acquainted there, for he had scarcely entered the door before he was surrounded by pilots and engineers, who were eager to hear more about the burning of the Kendall than the newspapers had been able to tell them. George talked until he was tired, and then he and Bob signed their names to the register, and went in to dinner. When they had disappeared through the door of the dining-room, a man who had followed them unnoticed from the steamboat-landing to the hotel, and who had taken care to keep in the background while George was talking with his friends, stepped up to the desk, looked at the register, and turned and went out.

Having disposed of a good dinner, the boys left the hotel, intent on seeing as much of the city as they could in one short afternoon. They intended to remain in New Orleans that night, and take the steamer which sailed for Galveston the next evening. They roamed through the streets until dark, George pointing out to his country friend all the objects of interest they passed, and, after purchasing a few necessary articles of clothing (which required the outlay of ten dollars more of David Evans's money),

they returned to the hotel. When they wanted to go to bed Bob placed his money in the hands of the clerk, and was shown to a room adjoining the one his friend George was to occupy. He went to sleep, thinking of the folks at home, and bemoaning the folly of which he had been guilty in leaving them, and, about midnight, was awakened by a rapping at his door—a whispered rapping, so to speak, as if the person who was outside wanted to arouse him and no one else. Bob started up in some alarm, and, when the sound was repeated, called out :

“Who’s there?”

“Watchman, sar,” replied the person outside.

“What do you want?”

“I’se got a letter for you, sar.”

“A what?”

“A letter what a gemman gave me to give you, sar.”

“A letter!” thought Bob. “Who in the world can be writing to me? It isn’t George, of course, for he knows that I am in the room next to his own. It can’t be that——great Moses!”

Bob was frightened by something that just then occurred to him. Could it be possible that his father had learned of his whereabouts, and that he had

come to the city by rail to intercept him and take him home again? Bob trembled all over, as he asked himself the question, and recalled the fact that David Evans's money was fifteen dollars short. As he could see no other way out of the difficulty, he resolved that he would not receive the letter at all. He would wait until the watchman went down stairs, and then he would put on his clothes, and leave the hotel with all possible haste. He lay down again, and, as he drew the quilts over him, exclaimed:

“You’ve made a mistake, boy. That letter is for somebody else.”

“De gemman done tol’ me to give it to Mr. Owens, in number twenty-six,” was the reply.

Bob groaned. Very reluctantly and with much fear and trembling he got out of bed, and having hunted up his candlestick—knowing that he was inexperienced, George had told the clerk that it might not be quite safe to trust him with the gas—he struck a light, and as he opened the door a black hand holding a small piece of paper was thrust in. It was a very small piece of paper, but still it was large enough to contain words that might almost knock Bob over. He closed the door, hurried to the light and unfolding the note, read as follows:

“I have just found a steamer that will sail for Galveston within half an hour. I am on board of her now. Get your money from the clerk and come at once. You will find a carriage at the door and the driver knows where to take you!”

Bob drew a long breath of relief, and with an exclamation of surprise he dropped the note and began to pull on his clothes. He was relieved to know that the note was not from his father, and surprised to learn that George had so suddenly changed the plans he had formed the day before. What had happened to induce him to leave the hotel at that time of night to hunt up a steamer?

It took Bob but a few minutes to dress, and when he had put the note into his pocket he blew out the candle and hurried from his room. He lost his way two or three times by turning into the wrong halls and going down the wrong stairs, but he managed to find his way to the office, at last, and asked for his money and his bill. The clerk handed out the greenbacks, which were enclosed in an envelope, and Bob was waiting to learn how much his bill amounted to, when he was greatly astonished to hear a familiar voice behind him exclaim:

“What in the world are you doing here?”

Bob turned and saw the cub pilot standing before him. He had no collar or vest on, and it was plain that he had dressed in something of a hurry before he left his room.

"Where are you going?" asked George, seeing that Bob held his money in his hand.

"Why, I was going out after you," answered Bob, as soon as he could speak.

"And where did you expect to find me? I haven't been out of my room before to-night."

"Didn't you write me a note stating that you had found a steamer that was going to sail for Galveston inside of half an hour?"

"I!" exclaimed George, in great amazement. "No, sir."

"There!" said Bob. "I told the watchman he had made a mistake. Here's the note."

George read the note, and so did the clerk; and then the watchman, who happened to pass by at that moment, was called upon for an explanation. "Where did you get this note?" asked the clerk.

"From dat gemman out dar in de carriage, sar," was the prompt reply.

"Let's go and see if it is any one we know," said George.

The two boys hurried to the sidewalk, and, when they reached it, found there was no carriage there. The watchman, who had followed close at their heels, seemed to be very much astonished.

"The gentleman, whoever he was, found that he had made a mistake, and so he drove off," said George, as he tore the note into the smallest possible fragments, and put them into his pocket. "It is of no consequence. Let's go back to bed, Bob."

They stopped for a few minutes at the desk, to compare notes with the clerk and the watchman; and, when everybody was satisfied that it was the man in the carriage, and not the darkey, who had made the mistake, Bob saw his money put back into the safe, and he and George went up-stairs. The latter went into Bob's room, and, when he had closed and locked the door, proceeded to explain how he had happened to follow Bob to the office.

"I heard some one pounding on your door," said he; "but I couldn't hear what he said to you. Knowing that you had no friends in the city, my curiosity was excited, and so I came out to see what was going on; but I found your room empty. It was lucky that I followed you to the office, for I learned something by it. You remember that res-

cued passenger we found in the old trapper's cabin, don't you? That was my Uncle John."

Bob looked bewildered, but said nothing.

"He overheard every word of our conversation," continued the young pilot. "He wasn't asleep at all. He knows that we are going to Texas together, and he means to prevent it, if he can."

"What would he have done with me, if he had got me into that carriage?" asked Bob, drawing a long breath. "And why does he want to trouble me? I never did anything to him."

"No, but you carry the purse," replied George. "If he could manage to send you back up the river to St. Louis, or across the gulf to South America, it would leave me in a bad fix, for I have no money. He wants to keep me away from home, and he thinks he can do it by separating us. Now, Bob," added George, earnestly, "we must never lose sight of each other until we reach Texas, if we can help it!"

The boys spent an hour or more in talking the matter over, and then George went into his own room. Bob locked and barricaded his door, and tumbled into bed again, but not to sleep. Thinking of the trap he had so nearly run into, kept him

awake. It was anything but pleasant for him to know that he had an enemy in a man with whom he was not acquainted, whom he would not have recognised if he had walked into his room at that moment, and who might at any time, when he was off his guard, get him into his power and ship him off to South America, or some other out-of-the-way place. Bob did not ask himself what his favorite border men would have done under similar circumstances, and in fact he never thought of them now. He no longer looked upon them as objects worthy of emulation. He and George were very careful after that. They were scarcely out of sight of each other during the following day, and it was not until they were safe on board the steamer, bound for Galveston, and George had searched high and low, to make sure that his uncle was not on board, that they began to breathe easily.

The journey across the gulf was made without the occurrence of any incident that was worthy of note. Neither of them enjoyed it, for the sail grew monotonous after a while, and, as they had nothing to read, and had exhausted almost every topic of conversation, they could only sit and think—one, of his happy boyhood's home, toward which he was hastening,

and where he knew he would not be welcomed by those in possession, and the other of the loved ones he was leaving behind, and whom he might never see again. He hoped he might see them again, however, and laid plans accordingly. He wouldn't spend any of David's money for a hunter's outfit, as he had intended to do. If he had had it all in his possession, and could have reached home without spending any of it, he would have turned about at once; but, as that was impossible, he would go on, and seek employment as soon as he reached his journey's end. George had told him that herders received forty dollars per month, and that, in Bob's estimation, was a large sum of money. At that rate it would take him but a little over four months to earn as much as he had stolen from David Evans. As soon as he could save the amount he would send it to David, and, as soon after that as he could earn enough to pay his expenses, he would start for home. "And when I get there, if ever I do," added Bob, with tears of penitence in his eyes, "I'll stay, if I have to live on a crust of bread a day."

This was the way Bob talked to himself while he was sailing from New Orleans to Galveston, and he meant every word of it. But he had not yet reaped

the full reward of his folly, and something happened to prevent him from carrying out his plans.

It was night when they reached the end of their journey, and the long wharf at which the steamer landed was so dark that the boys, after getting out of the circle of light made by the dim lanterns that hung over the gang-plank, could hardly see where they were going. There was a crowd on the wharf, too, and in passing through it the companions became separated for so long a time that Bob began to fear that they should never find each other again. He was so greatly bewildered by the noise and confusion, and was jostled about so roughly that he became completely turned around and came near walking off the wharf into the bay; but at last, to his great joy, he ran into the arms of George, who was in search of him, and following in his lead, soon found himself standing on solid ground once more. Then George came to a standstill.

"I am not at all acquainted with the city, although I have been here a number of times," said he, "so we will wait for a guide. Here comes one now."

As George spoke a wagon heavily loaded with trunks rattled off the wharf and turned up the street.

The boys followed it, and by keeping it always in

view, were finally led to the railroad depot, which was the place they wanted to find. Their route now lay by rail to Austin, the capital of the state, and thence by stage to the little Spanish town of Palos, which was within a few miles of George's home.

When the boys entered the depot they found a train all ready to start. The engine was hissing, baggage-men were banging trunks about in the most approved style, and a crowd of people, all anxious to purchase tickets, were gathered about the window of the office. "Pitch in with the rest," said George. "Push and crowd as hard as you can. It's our only chance of getting off to-night. But hold on! perhaps you had better give the money to me. I am more experienced in such matters."

Bob had found it very inconvenient to go to his money-belt every time he wanted a bill, so just before the steamer landed he had transferred all the greenbacks to his pocket-book and thrown the belt overboard. Being quite willing that George should take the responsibility of procuring tickets for them, he thrust his hand into his pocket, and to his intense amazement and alarm found it empty. He felt in the other, but there was nothing there either. Then he examined his clothes everywhere, but nothing in

the shape of a pocket-book could be found. All this while George stood holding out his hand, and looking first at the crowd about the window, and then at the train, as if mentally calculating their chances for getting away on it. Wondering at last why Bob was so long in finding the pocket-book, he turned to look at him, and found that he had backed up to a truck, on which he was sitting with his chin resting on his breast and his hands hanging by his side.

"What's the matter?" cried George, springing forward. "Are you sick?"

"No; but my money is gone!" was the faint reply.

"Gone!" gasped George.

Bob could only nod his head.

"Why, it can't be possible. Are you sure of it? Have you looked in all your pockets? Try again."

The thought that perhaps he might have overlooked the pocket-book infused a little hope and energy into Bob, who sprang to his feet and went through the search again, George lending assistance. But there was nothing to be found. While they were thus engaged the crowd about the window grew

smaller and smaller, and finally, just as the last man seized his ticket and started on a run for the cars, the bell rang and the train moved slowly out of the depot, leaving the two boys sitting on the truck and staring blankly at each other.

CHAPTER XVI.

DAN MAKES A DISCOVERY.

HOW in the name of wonder did you manage to lose that money?" asked George, as soon as he could speak. "Where and when did you see it last?"

"I had it in my hands not ten minutes before we left the boat," replied Bob, hardly able to keep back his tears. "It was safe, too, when I came off the gang-plank, for I took pains to satisfy myself of the fact. When we got into that crowd I was pushed about, first one way and then the other, and, now that I think of it, I am sure I felt a hand in my pocket."

"Very likely you did," answered George. "Your pocket has been picked, that is the long and short of the matter, and here we are, alone in a big city, without a cent to bless ourselves with, and not a friend within hundreds of miles of us."

Bob was greatly alarmed, and even George, with his eighteen months' experience with the ways of the world, was sick at heart. They sat in gloomy silence for several minutes, and then George brightened up a little and spoke more cheerfully.

"It isn't as bad as it might be," said he, "for we know where we can get money. If I can find somebody in the morning who is good-natured enough to give me writing materials and a stamp, I'll drop a line to Mr. Gilbert, and he'll see us through. But it will be two weeks before we shall hear from him, and where are we going to sleep and what shall we get to eat while we are waiting? That's what bothers me. We must hunt the city over for work. I am willing to do anything honest."

"Where are we going to sleep to-night?" inquired Bob, whose courage was all gone, and who felt as if he would like to crawl into a hollow log out of sight, and give full rest to his feelings in a copious flood of tears.

"We can't sleep anywhere," replied George.

"Can't we find a dark stairway somewhere?" asked Bob, who remembered that the heroes of some of his favorite books, who afterward became rich enough to ride in their carriages, had passed more

than one night in that way when they first set out to seek their fortune.

"It wouldn't be safe," returned George, quickly. "There are policemen at almost every corner, and they would be sure to find us and arrest us as vagrants. They'll not trouble us as long as we keep moving, and that is the only safe thing we can do. We're bound to have a hard night of it, Bob, but the sun always brings the day."

And they did have a hard night of it. They walked the streets for long hours, and became so weary and footsore that they would have been glad to lie down in the first clean place they could find and go to sleep. The sun brought the day, it was true, but it did not bring any improvement in their circumstances. At an early hour they found a man opening a grocery store. George went in and told him their story; and the man, after listening to it, gave him the writing materials he needed, and also a liberal supply of crackers and cheese; but he could not give him work, and neither could he tell them of anybody who wanted to hire a boy.

The two friends sat on a box in front of the store, while they ate their crackers and cheese, and then set out to find the post-office. The letter, which

George had written at the grocer's desk, having been mailed, their next hard work was to find something to do; but their efforts in this direction met with no success. True, they found several business men who wanted help, but they had no use for a cub pilot, or for a boy who had never done anything in his life; and, besides, they asked for something the wanderers could not produce, namely, letters of recommendation. The boys roamed the streets all that day, without anything more to eat, or without stopping to rest; and, when night came, they were almost exhausted, and utterly discouraged. Even George, who had thus far tried to keep up a light heart, was gloomy enough now.

"We can't walk the streets to-night as we did last night," said he; "and there is only one place that I know of where we can go to sleep, and that is the station-house."

George had spoken of this several times during the day, and explained to Bob that the station-house was the place where destitute persons went to obtain a night's lodging. He added one item of information that made the cold chills creep all over Bob, and that was that if they once went in there they could

not get out until morning, for they would be locked in.

“I believe I'd rather die for want of sleep, than go to such a place as that,” thought Bob, putting his hand first into one pocket and then into another, as he had been doing all day, in the vain hope of finding the missing pocket-book tucked away in some remote corner. “It seems to me that I couldn't breathe if I were locked up—I couldn't, possibly—hal-lo!”

While Bob was talking thus to himself he made a discovery that was almost as welcome as the discovery of a gold mine would have been at any other time. In the watch-pocket of his trousers he found a little round ball of paper, and when his fingers came in contact with it a thrill of hope shot through him. Gradually slackening his pace, and allowing George to get a few feet in advance of him, he slyly pulled out the ball, opened it, and found that it was a fifty-cent piece. He had put it in there very carelessly, thinking nothing of it; but it was worth something to him now. His fingers closed about it as eagerly as they had closed about the tin-box, when he pulled it out from under the log where Dan Evans had hidden it.

"No station-house for me to-night," thought he. "This will bring me supper and lodging. It isn't enough for both, so George must look out for himself. I've saved his life twice, paid his expenses almost ever since I met him, and I think it high time I was taking care of number one. Now, how shall I slip away from him?"

This was the problem which Bob now devoted himself to solving. It did not prove to be a very difficult one, for it solved itself. He continued to walk very slowly, while his companion hurried along as if he wanted to leave some of his gloomy thoughts behind him, and presently he was nearly half a block ahead of Bob. He looked back now and then, to see if Bob was coming, and then hurried on as before. Bob kept his eye on him, and, as soon as the opportunity presented itself, he turned into a side-street and broke into a run. He was so weak and tired that he could scarcely stand upon his feet, but the prospect of a good supper and a bed to sleep in put life into him, and for two or three blocks he ran at the top of his speed. He turned into every street he came to, and, when he thought he had put a safe distance between himself and his companion, he

stopped and sat down on a door-step to recover his breath.

"I had to do it," thought Bob, who could not help feeling sorry when he thought of George wandering hungry, friendless and alone through the streets of the city. "I couldn't stand it any longer without food and sleep, and I have just enough money to see me through. Now I wonder if I can find that place again!"

Once on the previous night, and two or three times during the day, the boys had passed an eating-house, over the door of which was a huge lantern, with a notice on it containing the information that supper and lodging could be had there for fifty cents. This was the place Bob wanted to find, and, to his great joy, he went almost straight to it. He kept a sharp lookout for fear that he might run against George before he knew it; and, when he reached the eating-house, he stopped and looked all around to make sure that he was nowhere in sight. Then he went in, laid his fifty cents on the counter, and informed the proprietor that he wanted supper and a bed to sleep in. He was shown to a place at one of the tables in the room, and ate as only a hungry boy can eat. When he had satisfied his appetite he was

conducted to his room, and sank into a heavy slumber almost as soon as he touched the bed. He was aroused in the morning by a loud and long-continued rapping at his door, accompanied by cries of "Breakfast! breakfast!" He got up, but there was no breakfast for him. He resumed his wanderings about the city, not knowing where to go or what to do. He could not go home—O! how he wished now that the steamer had been hailed when she passed Rochdale, and that he had been discovered and compelled to go ashore. He could not find work, and he could not live much longer as he was living now. He was a miserable runaway. Once during the day he came very near encountering the boy he most wished to avoid. While he was passing one of the numerous hotels in the city, he saw George follow a gentleman in there. As soon as Bob caught sight of him he turned and walked in the opposite direction.

"He has either found work, or else he has been begging, and that gentleman is taking him in there to give him his breakfast," thought Bob. "Begging! Must I come down to that?"

Bob had shot very wide of the mark. George had not found work, and neither had he been begging.

He had found Mr. Gilbert, the very man to whom he had written the day before, and the two had spent a good portion of the night and all the morning in looking for Bob. The latter had not bettered his condition by running away from George.

Bob spent the forenoon in wandering about the streets, and was growing very hungry and almost desperate when his eye caught a notice that attracted his attention. It read: "Men wanted for the U. S. Cavalry service." Bob looked at it for several minutes, then put his hands into his pockets and moved on with his eyes fastened on the sidewalk, as if he were thinking deeply about something. When he came to a crossing he went over to the opposite side of the street and read the sign from there. Then he came back again and read it while standing in front of it. After that he looked in through the open door and saw three or four men in fatigue uniform sitting beside a long table, which was covered with papers and writing materials.

"There's a chance to get plenty to eat and a place to sleep," thought Bob, as he walked on again, "and I don't know that I can do any better. I can't go home; I don't know anything about such work as they have to do in a city, and I can't live

in this way. I'll ask them if they will take me, at any rate."

As Bob said this he turned about and walked toward the recruiting-office. He walked rapidly, as if he feared that his courage might fail him, and when he reached the door he went in without stopping to think about it. When he went in he was a free boy; when he came out he was not so, having sworn away his liberty for five years. Perhaps then he regretted the step he had taken as heartily as he regretted that he had run away from home; but it was too late to mend the matter. He could no longer go and come as he pleased, and neither was there any such thing as running away. But he was sure of something to eat and a place to sleep in, and that was what he wanted. He had a long term of years before him in which to think over the mistakes and follies of his life, and let us hope that it was of benefit to him.

And what were the people in Rochdale doing all this while? Let us go back and inquire. Let us return to Dan Evans, whom we have not seen since Bob stole David's money from him.

"Thar!" said Dan, to himself, as the report of his rifle rang through the woods, and the squirrel,

after turning two or three somersets, struck the ground with that dull thud so gratifying to a hunter's ears, "I reckon I've done got a breakfast now. If ye'd only showed yourself a little sooner I wouldn't had to go up to Owens's hen-roost, dog-gone it! That ole nigger Bijah done cotched me in the tree, an' he knowed me, too; but I don't keer fur that. The only thing that bothers me is to know what I am goin' to do next. I can't go hum, kase Dave an' the ole woman won't let me stay thar', an' thar aint no other place in the settlement whar I kin stay. My circus hoss, an' my fine guns that break in two in the middle, an' all the other nice things I was goin' to buy with my money, are up a holler stump, kase I can't use 'em while I'm livin' out here in the woods."

Talking thus to himself Dan re-loaded his rifle, picked up his squirrel and slowly and thoughtfully retraced his steps toward his camp. He was now learning the lesson that Bob Owens was destined to learn a few days later, and that was that the possession of money does not by any means make one happy. Dan had more in his hands now than he had ever hoped to earn by his own labor, and he had never been more miserable and discontented in

his life. He was lonely out there in the woods, and he would have been almost willing to give up the money, if by so doing he could bring himself back to his old mode of life again. When he was handling the money he was in ecstasies; but the unwelcome thought that it was of no earthly use to him would always force itself upon him sooner or later, and then he would think strongly of taking it back to his brother, with the assurance that he had stolen it from his father on purpose to return it to him. He thought strongly of it now. He was not so stupid but that he could see that he was getting rather low down in the world. He had no clothes except those on his back, and they afforded him but very little protection against the keen morning air—only three or four more matches in his pocket and but a dozen bullets and powder enough to shoot half of them. What should he do when his matches and ammunition were all gone?

“I dassent go to the landin’ to spend none of this money,” thought Dan, as he seated himself on the log beside the fire and began skinning the squirrel. “kase folks ’ll know it’s Dave’s money I’m spendin’, an’ then I’ll get into a furse, sure pop. Other fellers, like them Gordons, kin get along jest as smooth

and easy as fallin' off'n a log, an' here's me who's been a toilin' an' slavin' ever since I was knee-high to a duck, an' jest look at me! Whoop!" yelled Dan, who grew angry while he thought about it. "That's what makes me so pizen savage agin everybody!"

Dan's thoughts ran on in this channel as he was dressing the squirrel and preparing it for the spit, and while it was roasting he sat with his elbows on his knees and his head resting on his hands, looking steadily into the fire. But after the squirrel was done to his satisfaction and he had eaten a portion of it and his ravenous appetite had been somewhat appeased, he began to take a more cheerful view of things.

"I've got the money, anyhow," thought Dan, holding a leg of the squirrel in one hand and running the other through the leaves that were piled against the log on which he was sitting. "That's something I kin crow over. It's a heap of comfort to know that that thar mean pap an' Dave of our'n didn't cheat me outen my share of them greenbacks as slick as they thought they was a goin' to. Wal, now, whar's them greenbacks gone to?"

Dan laid his squirrel carefully down upon a piece

of bark which he had provided to serve as a plate, and kneeling beside the log, scraped away the leaves, but without discovering the object of which he was in search. The expression of astonishment which came upon his face gradually gave away to a look of alarm, and the rapid movements of his hands grew more rapid still as the fact seemed to dawn upon him that the box which contained his treasure had most unaccountably disappeared. At last the leaves were scraped away the whole length of the log, and Dan, with a wild yell, bounded to his feet. He stood motionless for a moment, and then dropping on his knees again, looked under the log, thinking that perhaps he had pushed the box under farther than he had intended, and that it had fallen into some little hollow out of sight. But there was no little hollow under the log that Dan could discover, although he ran his fingers over every inch of the ground. Dan's eyes seemed ready to start from their sockets.

"It's gone, an' I'm a busted man," he exclaimed, casting frightened glances on every side of him. "One of them thar haunts that lives in the gen'ral's lane has done come here an' run off with it. This ain't no place fur me!"

Dan reached rather hurriedly for his rifle, and was about to desert his camp with all possible haste, when he happened to discover something that made him take an altogether different view of the matter. The bushes behind the log had recently been disturbed—Dan was hunter enough to see that—and a second look showed him that some heavy body had passed through them. With his cocked rifle in his hand, Dan stepped over the log to make a still closer examination, and found that the trail that led through the bushes was so plain that he had no difficulty in following it. It conducted him directly to the place where Bob Owens had been concealed while he was watching Dan; but from that point it gradually grew fainter, and, when it reached the more open woods, it disappeared altogether. Almost the last sign of it that Dan could find was the print of a boot-heel in the soft earth. This he examined as closely as he could, through eyes blinded with tears of vexation and disappointment.

“’Taint pap, nor Dave, nuther,” said he, at length. “Nary one on ’em couldn’t git them big hoofs o’ their’n into a boot with sich a heel as this yere; but somebody was snoopin’ around not more’n five minutes ago, an’ who could it have been? Somebody

'sides pap knowed I had the money ; but who was it ?”

This was a question that Dan could not answer, nor was it answered at all until long months afterward. The loss of the money was a severe blow to him, and he could see nothing but a gloomy future before him. Up to this time he had felt comparatively safe, for he knew that, if he made up his mind to do so, he could win his way into his mother's good graces and David's very easily, by simply returning the latter's money ; but now this chance for a reconciliation was taken from him, and the thought almost drove him wild. How he lived through the next few days he could not have told to save his life. He roamed the woods day and night—his gloomy thoughts tormented him so that he could not keep still—shivering in the cold morning air, going hungry more than half the time, and all the while tortured by fears of some impending evil. At last the day came when his matches were all expended, and he had not a single charge of powder left in his horn. He had resolved to make a raid on Mr. Owens's hen-roost that night, although he could not for the life of him tell how he was going to cook the chickens after he got them, and was on his way to the plantation, when

he came to the road which led from Rochdale to the county-seat. As he was about to climb over the fence, he heard the clatter of hoofs close at hand, and drew back into the bushes just in time to escape discovery by the approaching horseman.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

THE horseman came in sight a moment later, and Dan looked at him in the greatest amazement. It was his brother David; but what a change had come over him since Dan last saw him at the cabin! If he was always dressed as he was now, the people in the settlement could no longer speak of him as "that raganuffin, Dave Evans." He wore a new suit of gray jeans, a pair of serviceable boots without a hole in them, and—which Dan did not fail to notice—were neatly blacked, a wide-brimmed felt hat, and, more wonderful than all, a collar and neck-tie. He was mounted on a high-stepping colt which Dan had often seen running in General Gordon's stable-lot, had a saddle and bridle that looked as though they might just have come out of the store; and, strapped to the saddle was a mail-bag which Dan had seen so often that he recognised it at once. David passed swiftly along the road and was out of

sight in a few seconds, but Dan had plenty of time to take in all these little details, and to note that his brother's face wore a happy, contented look, as if he felt at peace with himself and all the world. Dan contrasted his situation with his own, and grew angry at once.

"Wal," said he, as soon as he had recovered from his astonishment, "if that thar little Dave of our'n hain't got to be a mail-carrier! I done heared that the ole one was agoin' to quit, but who'd a thought that one of our tribe would a stepped into his boots? *Boots*, mind ye; an' them's something me an' Dave never owned afore. He must be makin' stacks of greenbacks, as much as ten or twelve dollars a month, mebbe," added Dan, laying down his rifle and leaning half way over the fence to take another view of the boy who was lucky enough to be earning money so rapidly. "Now, I'll jest tell ye what's the gospel truth: things must be lookin' up to hum right peart when thar's that much comin' in."

Dan forgot that he was hungry, and did not give another thought to the hen-roost he had made up his mind to rob that night. He went back into the woods and wandered aimlessly about, paying no heed to the direction he was taking, and was presently

aroused from his reverie by the sound of an axe. He looked up and was surprised and a little alarmed to find that he was in the neighborhood of his home. The potato cellar, which had once served as a prison for Don Gordon, was close in front of him, and through the tall trees, which the autumnal winds had already stripped bare of leaves, he could see the cabin.

Dan was about to turn away and plunge into the woods again, when he noticed that there was some one at work in the yard behind the house. He was sure that it could not be his brother, for David had not yet had time to go to the landing and deliver his mail. It could not be his father either, for Godfrey was hiding in the woods as well as himself; and besides, the man who was at work in the yard wore a white shirt—Dan could see it plainly through the trees—and that was something Godfrey had not owned for long years. But Dan wanted to see who it was, so he crept nearer to the fence, and when he obtained a fair view of the workman he almost let his rifle fall out of his hands in his astonishment. It was his father after all; but Dan could hardly bring himself to believe it until he had rubbed his eyes two or three times and taken as many good

looks at him. Godfrey was dressed like a gentleman. There was not a hole to be seen in any of his garments, his hair and whiskers were neatly combed, he wore a hat with a brim to it on his head, boots instead of shoes on his feet, and, what surprised Dan more than anything else, his sleeves were rolled up and he was walking into the wood-pile as if he were in earnest. Two or three times while the boy was looking at him he stopped, took off his hat and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

“Wal, of all the things I ever heard tell on this yere is the beatenest,” thought Dan, as soon as his mind had become settled so that he could think at all. “Looks like pap in the face, but don’t act like I ever seed him act afore.”

Dan took another good look at his father and asked himself what in the world could have happened to bring him home and set him to work ; and while he was revolving the problem in his mind he ran his eye about the premises and saw that sundry little improvements had been made during his absence. The little log structure which was called the corn-crib, although Dan had never seen any corn in it, had been thoroughly repaired, and the golden ears protruded from every crack between the

slats, showing that it was well filled. The miserable apology for a stable which sheltered the only mule Godfrey owned had been newly covered; a little shed had been erected against the rear wall of the cabin and was filled to the roof with dry firewood; the holes in the house had been freshly chinked; the rags had disappeared from the windows, their places being supplied with new lights of glass; the chips and other rubbish that had for so many years been accumulating in the back yard had been cleared away; and in short, the place looked, as Godfrey would have expressed it, as though white folks lived there. The change was so great that Dan could hardly argue himself into the belief that it was his old home; and when his mother came down the road, as she did a few minutes later, he became fully convinced that he was either dreaming or else that his eyes and ears had entered into a conspiracy to deceive him. As soon as Godfrey saw his wife coming he jumped over the fence and took the heavy basket she was carrying out of her hand.

"Why, Godfrey, how nice things begin to look," exclaimed Mrs. Evans, and Dan could not remember when he had seen her smile before.

"Don't they, though," replied Godfrey. "I tell

ye, Susie, I haint felt so peart since the good ole days when we had niggers to do our work for us. It's a heap of comfort to know that yer a trifle forehanded, aint it? The critters is well provided with shelter an' corn; thar's taters enough in the cellar an' bacon enough in the smoke-house to run us till I kin 'arn some more; the shed is full of fire-wood; an' now it kin blow an' snow an' freeze jest as soon as it dog-gone pleases!"

Godfrey and his wife went into the cabin, and Dan turned about and crept back into the woods. "Things *is* a lookin' up to hum right peart," said he, to himself, as he sat down on a log to think over what had just transpired. "Pap's got a pair of store boots; Dave's mail carrier; mam looks like a lady; thar's glass windows to the house, an' here's me—jest look at me!" added Dan, glancing down at his ragged clothes. "Now I'll tell ye what's the gospel truth: Pap's the feller that crept up an' stole them greenbacks while I was out shootin' that squirrel," continued Dan, who just then forgot the conclusions at which he had arrived when he found the print of the boot-heel in the soft earth. "He was afeared to spend the money, so he brings it back to Dave, makes up with him an' the ole woman,

an' everything goes as slick as 'lasses, an' nobody don't care no more for me nor if I wasn't Dan at all."

There are boys, and men, too, in the world who can not bear to see other people happy, and we are by this time well enough acquainted with Dan to know that he was one of this class. He was not happy—he could not be with his disposition—and it would have afforded him infinite satisfaction if he could have found some way to render his relations, who now seemed to be getting on so nicely in the world, as miserable as he was himself. It hurt him to know that they could enjoy themselves while he was away from home. Why didn't they come out into the woods and search for him, and when they found him take him to the cabin, put good clothes on him and act as though they were glad to see him? "That's what they had oughter do," exclaimed Dan, "an' to pay 'em for not doin' it I just wish I had them hundred and sixty dollars now. I'd like to see Dave get 'em again."

Dan scraped a few dry leaves together under the lee of the log, and went supperless to bed that night. He lay almost within a stone's throw of the cabin, and could hear the door slam every time any one

passed in or out. He fell asleep just before daylight, and when he awoke he started up in great confusion, for he saw his brother sitting on a log near him. Dan was not more surprised to find him there than he was to notice that he had on another suit of clothes and a pair of warm mittens. David must be getting rich.

"Dan, you don't know how glad I am to see you again," said David, as soon as his brother was fairly awake. "Where in the world have you kept yourself? Father and I have been in the woods every day looking for you, but could find no traces of you."

This announcement arrested the angry words that arose to Dan's lips. He must have been missed at home, or else his father and brother would not have spent time in looking for him.

"You shake as though you were half frozen," continued David, glancing at his brother's blue cold hands and face. "Get up and come into the house with me. There's a good fire there."

"Wal, I dunno," replied Dan, sitting up on his bed of leaves, and speaking as plainly as his chattering teeth would permit. "Mebbe I ain't wanted thar."

"Why, yes, you are, What put that notion into your head?"

"Ye heared me tell pap whar yer money was, I reckon, didn't ye?"

"Of course I did; but I don't bear you any ill will for that."

"Nor mam, nuther?"

"No, nor mother, either. I wish I had never earned the money, for it has made us a world of trouble. But, we've begun all over again, and are going to do better, all of us. Come on, now, Dan; mother wants to see you, and so does father."

But Dan didn't know whether to come on or not. He felt that he had forfeited all right to his home, and that he would be justly punished if he were never permitted to cross the threshold again. But, he was cold, hungry, and utterly discouraged; and, after David had argued with him a few minutes longer, he allowed him to lift him to his feet and lead him toward the cabin. He hesitated at the door, but David pushed him in, and Dan was not a little astonished at the reception that was extended to him. His mother kissed him and cried over him, his father wrung his hand until Dan was almost ready to cry himself, and then he was placed in a chair in the

warmest corner. As soon as he could handle a knife and fork, a plate filled with the most substantial breakfast he had ever eaten under that roof was passed over to him, and Dan did ample justice to it. He was left pretty nearly to himself, for the family, knowing what his feelings must be, did not trouble him with any questions. He sat in his chair—it was a *chair*, too, he noticed, and not a nail-keg with a board placed over the top of it—with his head hanging down and his chin resting on his breast; but his eyes were roving everywhere, and they found much to excite his wonder. The cabin had been furnished with a new table and a few chairs during his absence; two comfortable beds had taken the places of the miserable “shake-downs;” the cracked and broken dishes had given way to new ones, and everything was as neat as it could be kept. Dan felt out of place there.

When Godfrey and David had finished their breakfast they sat down in front of the fire to whet their axes, after which the former, with the remark that they had a hundred cords of wood to cut for General Gordon, bade his wife and Dan good-bye, and the two left the cabin. Dan felt much more at his ease after they were gone. The nice, warm breakfast he

had eaten, and the thorough thawing-out he had undergone, brought his spirits back to him again, and he began to make some inquiries in regard to several little matters that had aroused his curiosity.

"Say, mam," said he, "what brung pap hum?"

"The general was the cause of his coming home," replied Mrs. Evans. "He found your father in the woods, and talked to him in such a way that he promised to come back and turn over a new leaf; and I am glad to say that he has done it."

There was one thing Mrs. Evans did not tell Dan, (probably she was not acquainted with the fact herself), and that was, that if Godfrey had not taken his old commander's advice, and returned to his home and gone to work in earnest to support his family, he would have been in jail before another day had passed over his head. Godfrey himself did not know this, for the general had made no threats. He had gained his point by argument.

"How come Dave carryin' the mail?" asked Dan.

"The general has the contract, and he hires David to do the work," was the answer.

"He must be makin' a pile of money, I reckon, aint he?"

"Thirty dollars a month."

Dan opened his eyes in great surprise. "How much'll that be in a year?" he asked.

"Three hundred and sixty dollars."

"Whew! We're gittin' rich, aint we, mam?"

"O, no! There's not a cent coming into the family except what your father and David earn by their daily labor. David is heavily in debt."

"How came us by all these yere nice things then?"

"Well, David had just fifty dollars in money. Ten dollars of it he earned by breaking Don Gordon's pointer, and the rest he received from Silas Jones for two young bears that were caught in that trap on Bruin's Island. Some of the money was used to pay our grocery bill, and the rest was spent on the house. David owes the general a hundred dollars for that colt he rides, and he is worth every cent of two hundred."

"Wal now, mam," said Dan, with some hesitation, "that ain't all the money we'uns have got. Whar's them greenbacks Dave got fur ketchin' them quails?"

"Why, didn't you cut your father's pocket open and take the box?" asked Mrs. Evans, while an expression that Dan could not understand settled on her face.

"I did, an' sarved him right, too, fur tryin' to cheat me outen my share that he promised, honor bright, to give me!" exclaimed Dan. "Didn't he give it back to Dave?"

"He certainly did not."

"Wal, I don't know whar it is, more'n the man in the moon."

Mrs. Evans' face grew a shade paler, and, after looking steadily at Dan for a few seconds, she leaned back in her chair and covered her eyes with her hand. Here was another disappointment in store for the young mail carrier. He and his parents had been indulging in the hope that, when Dan returned to his home, the money for which Dave had worked so hard would be restored to him. Dan thought, by the way his mother looked at him, that she did not believe his story, so he hastened to assure her that he told nothing but the truth, following it up with a minute account of the manner in which the thief—whoever he was—had operated to secure possession of the box. His mother was satisfied that he stated the facts as they occurred, and there the matter was dropped.

David learned of the loss of his money when he came home that night, and although it was a severe

blow to him he bore up under it, rode his mail route regularly twice a week and spent the other four days in helping his father cut General Gordon's wood. Dan loitered about the house doing nothing, and finally began to act a little more like himself. The feeling that he had lost all his rights to a home under his father's roof gradually gave away to the opinion that he was of vastly more importance than anybody else. One day he said to his mother—

"Now, mam, I've waited just long enough for 'em. I don't want to be treated this yere way no longer. Ye hear me?"

"You have waited long enough for what?" asked his mother.

"Fur my good clothes an' a pair of store boots like Dave an' pap have got."

"You can have them just as soon as you earn them."

"'Arn 'em!"

"Certainly. That is the way your father and David got theirs."

"An' how long did it take 'em?" asked Dan, who was not a little shocked and enraged to learn that he must work for his nice things before he could own them.

"About a week. You ought to earn a dollar a day by cutting wood, and the general will give you all the work you can do."

"An' while I am workin' down thar must I wear these yere rags?" exclaimed Dan. "I'd look party if Don an' Bert should come along on them circus hosses of their'n, an' wearin' their shiny boots an' nice clothes, wouldn't I? No, sir! I must have something better fust. I'll speak to Dave about it jest as soon as he comes home to-night."

"Why, David can't help you," replied his mother. "He has to work hard for everything he wears."

"Can't help me?" yelled Dan, "an' him 'arnin' a'most four hundred dollars a year! Ye don't think no more of me in this house nor if I was a yaller dog. His credit is good at the store fur six months, kase I done heard Silas tell him so."

But Dan didn't speak to David about it, for his father spoke to *him*. When Godfrey came home that night he carried on his shoulder two axes, one of which looked as though it had just come out of the store. He put his own axe in the corner where it was usually kept, and with the new one in his hand he approached Dan's chair. "Thar, sonny,"

said he, cheerfully, "see what a nice present I brung ye. It's the fust one I've give ye in a long time, aint it? Take hold on it. 'Twon't hurt ye."

"What shall I do with it, pap?" asked the boy, as he took the axe in both hands, holding it as awkwardly as though he had never touched one before.

"Wal, Dannie, I'll tell ye," replied Godfrey, placing his hand on his son's shoulder and speaking in a confidential tone. "When the gen'ral found me loafin' about in the woods like a lazy wagabone as I was, he says to me: 'Godfrey,' says he, 'this is the principle we go on up to our house: them as don't work can't eat!' I've thought of them words a heap of times since I come home, an' I made up my mind that if rich folks do that way, poor folks had oughter, too. Now, I notus that yer amazin' willin' to set here in this yere cheer an' warm yourself by the fire that Dave makes up every mornin', an' yer scandalous fond of drinkin' the store-tea an' coffee made outen the water that he brings from the spring; but I never seed ye cut no wood yerself nor tote no water. Now, sich doin's as them won't work in this yere house no longer. Ye've had a powerful long rest, an' to-morrer mornin' I want to see that thar new axe sharper'n a

razor, so't ye kin go with me an' Dave to chop wood up to the gen'ral's."

Dan listened to this speech in silence, and could not muster up courage enough to make an impertinent reply, as he certainly would have done if his father had talked to him in this way a month before. But his father had never before talked to him in this way. If he had yelled and flourished his fists and jumped up and knocked his heels together, Dan would have met him half way ; but he could not understand this quiet, earnest manner that Godfrey seemed to have fallen into of late. He didn't like it either, for he was sure that it meant business. At any rate, the axe was sharpened that night with David's assistance, and at daylight the next morning Dan might have been seen in company with his father and David wending his way toward the general's wood lot.

Order having been reëstablished under Godfrey's humble roof, and the Evans family being once more on the road to prosperity, the little settlement of Rochdale, which had been stirred from centre to circumference by the incidents, exciting and amusing, that we have attempted to describe in this series of books, once more fell back into its old habits, and

peace and quietness reigned. The settlers, like so many hibernating animals, seemed to have crawled into their holes for their winter's sleep, and only showed themselves to the world on mail-days, or when five long whistles announced that some steamer was about to touch at the landing. On these occasions it was remarked that two persons, who had never been known to miss a boat or a mail-day, no matter what the weather might be, were never seen at the landing now. They were Godfrey Evans and Dan. The latter, at first, would have been glad to resume his lazy habits, but his father kept him steadily at work, and at the end of the first week presented him with the money he had earned. This was a great encouragement to Dan, and from that time forward work was not quite so distasteful to him. Dan doesn't hunt as much now as he did a few months ago, and neither does he own a breech-loading shotgun; but he is a thrifty, hard-working boy, and has placed a very nice little sum of money in Don Gordon's hands for safe-keeping, besides refunding that ten dollars, the loss of which had occasioned David so much trouble and anxiety.

As for Godfrey, there was no sham about his reformation. He went to work in earnest to make amends for the long years he had spent in idleness,

and, in order that he might begin right, he told the general the story of that highway robbery, and handed over to him the first twenty dollars he could save out of his earnings, with the request that it might be forwarded to Clarence Gordon's father. Then he breathed easier. He felt as if a mountain had been removed from his shoulders.

Don and Bert Gordon kept on the even tenor of their way, and, having seen David established as mail-carrier, set to work, with the assistance of Fred and Joe Packard, to build another shooting-box on the site of the one that was burned by Lester Brigham and Bob Owens. They knew now that it was not Godfrey Evans who set fire to it, for their father told them so; but he did not tell them who the guilty ones were, and they never tried to find out. The new shooting-box was finished in a week's time, and, as Don had predicted, it threw the old one far into the shade. Lester Brigham went over there one night to look at it, but he left it just as he found it. Lester was not the boy he was once. He was as much alone in the world as though there had not been another youth of his age within a hundred miles of him. How he passed his time no one knew or cared to ask. He often thought of his old friend,

Bob Owens, and wondered what had become of him. Of course everybody knew that he had run away from home, but no one dreamed that he took David's money with him when he went. The general impression seemed to be that Godfrey and Dan could produce it at any moment, if they saw fit to do so.

David faithfully fulfilled the duties of mail-carrier during the winter, and at the end of six months he was all out of debt, and had a nice little sum of money laid by for a rainy day. One morning he rode down to the post-office after the mail that was to be carried to the county-seat, and Silas Jones handed him the following note, which he read as he galloped along :

“FRIEND DAVID:

It may surprise you to know that father has just turned over to me the hundred dollars you paid him for that colt, and that I hold it subject to your order. Father intended to return it to you all the time, and to make you a present of the horse ; but he didn't let anybody know it, for he wanted you to believe that you had got to work for your nag before you could own him. He doesn't want you to get into the way of leaning upon any one, or of thinking that you will always have a friend to lend you a

hand when you get into a tight place. You have shown him that you are able and willing to take care of yourself, and so he wants to help you.

Yours,

DON GORDON."

It was, indeed, a surprise to David. He was just a hundred dollars richer than he thought he was. During his ride he could think of nothing but the general's kindness, and he made the mental resolution that he would prove himself worthy of it. When he returned to the landing that afternoon, he waited until Silas had distributed the mail, in order to purchase some groceries for his mother, and found that there was another surprise in store for him. When the postmaster gave him the general's mail, which David always carried home now, he gave him also a letter addressed to himself. He did not recognise the handwriting, so he did as a good many people do when they receive letters from an unknown source: he looked at the envelope, and tried to guess whom it was from. Then he put the general's mail into his pocket, took his purchases under his arm, mounted his horse, and, having started him toward home pulled out the letter again and tore off the envelope. The first thing that caught his eye was a check for fifty dollars.

"There!" exclaimed the young mail-carrier, "I've opened a letter intended for somebody else; but if there's another Dave Evans about here, I don't know him."

David looked at the check again, then at the signature at the bottom of the letter. It was from Bob Owens, and read as follows:

"No doubt you will be surprised when you receive this, for I don't suppose that you or anybody else in Rochdale ever expected to hear from me again. I owe you a hundred and sixty dollars and fifty cents, and hand you herewith a check for fifty of it. It is the first money I ever earned in my life. I should have been glad to send it before, but this is the first I have received. I am a private soldier in the regular army. My pay is small, and out of it I have to buy everything I wear, so my savings do not amount to any great sum. You probably know by this time how I came into possession of the money. I followed Dan to his camp, saw him hide the box under a log, and go out to shoot a squirrel for his breakfast. When he was out of sight I slipped up and took the box, and ran away from home to spend the money. I have never regretted the act but once, and that has been every moment I have lived since I left Mississippi. I hope you have not suffered for

want of the money. Have all the patience with me you can, and I will send you the rest just as soon as I can earn it."

Then followed a postscript requesting David to acknowledge the receipt of the money, and telling him where to send his letter. It also contained the information that Bob had just written a letter to his father (he said he knew he did wrong in keeping him in suspense so long, but he could not find it in his heart to write to him until he could tell him that he had taken the first step toward making amends for some of his misdeeds), and, for fear that the letter might miscarry, he (Bob) would be glad if David would see Mr. Owens, and give him his son's address.

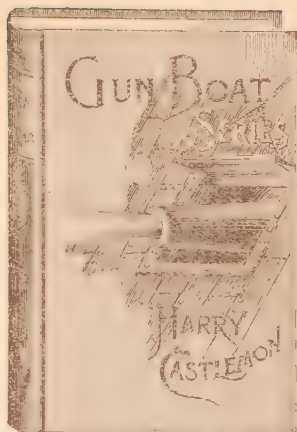
"That clears Dan, and father, too," said David, as soon as he had found his tongue. "I didn't want to think hard of them while they are trying their best to do what is right, but somehow I couldn't help feeling that that money was hidden in the woods, and that it would some day be brought out for the benefit of somebody besides mother and myself. Am I not the luckiest fellow in the world? Whatever else Bob Owens may be now, he is an honest boy."

This was the opinion of everybody who heard of

this act of reparation on the part of the runaway. It made him more popular in the settlement than he had ever been while he was at home. People now remembered of reading in the newspapers a long account of the coolness and courage he had exhibited on the night the Sam Kendall was burned; and some of those who had had the most to say about Bob, when he first ran away, now began to see that there were some good things in him, and predicted that he would come out all right in the end. Bob is in the army now. He is on the plains, among the Indians, right where he wanted to be; but he would be glad, indeed, if he were a long way from there. The only thing that prevented him from being with General Custer, when that gallant soldier and his command were massacred by Sitting Bull and his warriors, was the receipt of an order, that very morning, detailing him as one of the guard of a wagon-train. Bob doesn't think as much of that wild country as he did once. His feelings have undergone a very great change since the day he stole the money belonging to the MAIL CARRIER.

THE END.

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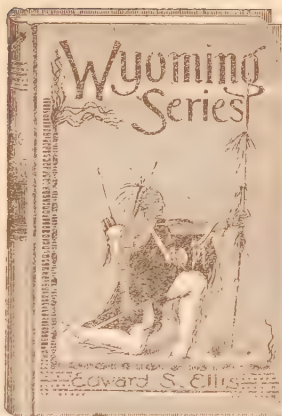
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